

***A World within a World within 'The World':  
The Origins of the Universal Brotherhood, an Australian  
Countercultural, Back-to-the-land, New Age, Alternative Society  
and New Religious Movement Community.***

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Date Submitted for examination: 19.10.2011

Examined hardbound thesis submission: 25.5.2012

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



# *Dedication*

*To all those who have dreamed  
a better world  
and tried to bring it into reality...  
even if unsuccessfully.*



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## Notes on the Text

Textual coding is used in this study to represent the immediacy, subjectivity and personality of the various layers of ‘insider’ knowledge and experience; while maintaining the reflectivity, objectivity and impersonality of the ‘outsider’ commentary.

## Footnotes

The footnotes are designed to provide on-the-spot, in-text information about people, authors texts, groups and events referred to in the various sections, and to keep these close at hand for the non-academic reader; to contextualise the period in which the UBI founders lived for readers sometimes four generation removed from the times written about; to provide information which, while sometimes appearing tangential is none the less relevant to the historical narrative and its contextualisation; to provide personal asides from my own lived experiences with the Robinsons designed to flesh out insider participant perspectives, and to further reference the milieu in which the subjects wrote and acted. The use of footnotes was a common device in many of the texts read by the Robinsons; the thesis design has almost unwittingly mimicked these texts.

The length of these footnotes is directly proportional to their importance and relevance to issues discussed in the main text. Often the longer footnotes present a brief historical sketch of a relevant group or person referred to, references that could be explored further via the online resource cited – often Wikipedia (see *Use of Wikipedia*’ p. 21).

## Use of fonts to indicate voices

*Fred Robinson*: While noted and explained when first employed in the text, the *Lucinda Calligraphy* font has been employed to indicate Fred Robinson’s idiosyncratic lexicon and writing style within the main text, often without using inverted commas, and without referencing. Remembered phrases, terms and maxims of Fred’s are used to help depict him – and to allow him posthumous agency. Longer quotes identify the source (pers. comm., 1970s) to identify personal communication with the author, or (lectures 1970s) to identify public presentations. Where a verbatim source can be attributed to a hard archival record I have not used this device, and have employed traditional quotation and referencing styles.

*Mary Broun-Robinson*: Less often, I have employed *Freestyle Script font* for UBI's co-founder, Mary Broun-Robinson (née O'Dwyer). In Mary's case her voice is depicted to recount the way her own phraseology, terms, and maxims were later part of the idiom and teachings of the Universal Brotherhood Community.

The *italicised Times New Roman font* indicates the joint voices of Fred Robinson and Mary Robinson. All the *Shalam Light*, and *Shalam Newsletter* quotations are italicised with 12 point font, with the longer quotes indented.

## **Use of Columns**

Longer quotes from organisations such as the Rosicrucian Order of the Aquarians and any media texts which were columned in the original have been reproduced in 11 point font size, in two justified columns, and without indentation. This device immediately identifies such texts. Such reproduction also replicates font size relationships of the text headings, and the bolding of certain words, phrases, or paragraphs, while also retaining older conventions such as the use of “double inverted commas” for quoting of the Robinsons in the original text, and any of the other identifying punctuation quirks that existed in the source data.

## **Capitalisations**

Reversion to the traditional convention of capitalising both headings and titles of books mirrors the capitalisation policy of the Robinsons' archival newsletters, and most of the primary texts referenced and examined. These look odd when *decapitalised*. In the interest of consistency all the main words in the referenced texts are also capitalised.

## **Reference Abnormalities**

To retain the character of the texts from which the Robinsons drew their information I have employed maximal capitalisation throughout the reference list. I have used the legal names of authors while acknowledging *noms de plume* in both in-text references and in the Reference list.



## Glossary of Terms

This Glossary helps make sense of some of the more idiosyncratic terms used by the Robinsons, and in the Universal Brotherhood.

**Alignees:** This term relates to those people who aligned with Fred Robinson's teachings – supporting them, even if they did not join the Community.

**Alternative Society:** Sometimes capitalised, this term was used by the Robinsons to explain their goal – and the goal of the UBI – to start an 'Alternative Society' for the New Age.

**AnCore:** This term referred to UBI members in good standing who were contributing at a high administrative level in the Community.

**Attunement:** This term was introduced to New Age discourse via David Spangler in the early 1970s when he was living at the Findhorn Community: 'Attunement is communication through communion, through recognising the oneness that has always been there. There is no flow between – there is oneness with' (Spangler 1975, p. 96).

**Back-to-the-land:** From the late 1960s and through the '70s this term was used to refer to what was almost a movement. I have therefore often capitalised it, and used it as part of a longer depiction of the UBI – a Back-to-the-land New Age Countercultural Community.

**CentreCore:** The term refers to the Governing Council of the Universal Brotherhood. The numbers varied from three in the early 1970s to about seven in the mid-1980s.

**Community:** The word 'Community' when capitalised refers to the Universal Brotherhood group at either/or both Carranya (Coorow) and Shalam (Armadale/Perth) until 1975; and the Community at Balingup – also the site of the current Brooklands Community in the South West of Western Australia).

**Counterculture:** Sometimes used with additional prefixes that depict a sub-culture within the counterculture: *cosmiccountercultural*; and *organiccounterculture*.

**Cult & Anticult:** The terms 'cult' and its derivatives, including 'anticult', 'intracult' and 'intercult' are used in the text only to allow discussion of 'cult' stereotyping.

**Hippie commune:** The term is used only in reference to media terms for alternative counterculture communities.

**Hu-man:** I term used by Fred Robinson to make a distinction between relatively unevolved and immature people of the world – drinkers, smokers and flesh-eaters – and the new 'Race of *Mankind*' who were mature and able to understand the truth.

**InCore:** This term refers to a caucus or middle-management-like body of personnel conferring with the UBI CentreCore on policy making decisions.

**In the consciousness:** This phrase attempted to name a state of inner ‘attunement’ to the principles, precepts and spirit of the UBI Community. However, the inability to define this state led to its negative manifestation – ‘out of the consciousness’ – being used to name (and in some cases shame) a person who was for no concrete reason seen to be out of attunement with the Community’s principles, precepts, and spirit, and so inevitably, its presiding ‘Principal’ or ‘Nucleus’.

**Members:** The capitalised and isolated word ‘Member’ or ‘Members’ refers to members of the UBI.

**Nucleus:** This pivotal term, used by the UBI Community to explain its mode of government, was suggested by the ‘Principal’ Mary Robinson. The way the ‘Nucleus’ worked in the Community is explored in the following extract from a *scientised* UBI pamphlet ‘An Understanding of Scientific Reasons for Extra Energies in the Brotherhood’:

There is a nucleus which is the energy life-giving centre of the cell; its purpose, function, and perfect form. This can be passed on to the parts of the cell by messengers called ‘ribosomes’. They pick up the pattern of the DNA and pass it on. It is my feeling that if we work to this perfect pattern; then we draw on extra life-force energy, an extra awareness in consciousness; in other words a whole new dimension in living; a step in evolution. And this is what has seemed to happen within the Brotherhood (Ward 1976).

Such rationale explained the need for UBI members to make a conscious effort to ‘harmonise’ with the ‘Nucleus’ if they were to receive the ‘extra energies’ (ibid.).

**New Age:** The word New Age when capitalised is designed to follow Sutcliffe’s convention (2003) of referring to the ‘New Age’, to demonstrate there is, sociologically speaking, no coherent *New Age Movement*, but rather a looser *collectivity*.

**New Religious Movement Community:** This is a descriptor of the UBI once it had effectively severed its connection with the countercultural, and mainly drug-using ‘hippies’ (who had formed the bulk of the early audiences of Fred Robinson), to become a more formal and organised religious group.

**OnCore:** This term refers to Seekers newly arrived at UBI to investigate it with the possibility of becoming Members.

**Principal:** This is the official title Mary Robinson gave to herself as the ‘Nucleus’ and co-founder – and the person most responsible for the UBI. She retired from this position in 1984 appointing Stephen Carthew to the position. Mary retained an honorary position on the Management Committee.

**Renunciate:** A word that Fred Robinson used to define his occupation from 1936, when he renounced the world, to become a neophyte and then a priest of the Rosicrucian Order of The Aquarians (ROTA). As a *renunciate* Fred did not participate in the UBI in an administrative or governmental capacity, although he often attended meetings where he proffered advice.

**Seekers:** The capitalised word ‘Seekers’ refers to those people investigating the Community and deciding whether to become Members. The term ‘seeker’ is a generic

term for those seeking to join any NRM, or simply seeking knowledge within the field of New Age information.

**Sensitives:** This is a generic term applied to all people with psychic gifts such as clairvoyance, clairaudience, automatic writing, channelling, and those who profess dreams and visions thought to be more than personal psychological experiences.

**Soul-polishing:** This term, used by both Fred and Mary Robinson stemmed from a metaphor related to the voluntary placing of the 'diamond soul' on the polishing wheel of Community living.

**Truth:** 'Truth' or 'the truth', is either italicised or placed within inverted commas to indicate that the concept is *about the truth* rather than being the truth.



## Abstract

This Thesis examines the personal, literary and experiential worlds of the founders of the Shalam-Carranya Community, which during the early 1970s was widely regarded as the most successful of the New Age back-to-the-land utopian communes within the world of Australia's 'hippie' counter-culture. During the last-half of the 1970s the movement became an organisation known as the Universal Brotherhood Incorporated (UBI) – one of only a few home-grown Australian ventures within the burgeoning world of New Religious Movements (NRMs). In 1989 it changed its constitution, becoming a secular, multiple-occupancy, eco-village – the Brooklands Community.

The influences and enthusiasms of the founders, Mary and Fred Robinson, and their baby-boomer-protégé Stephen Carthew (author of the study), are shown here to have formed *the world* of this religiously configured alternative society. The UBI is placed within existing typologies of NRMs. Findings suggest that this movement – and by extension many others – made a valuable contribution to society as cultural innovators; and this despite the obvious dangers associated with such socio-religious experiments. How the founders' worlds of experience shaped both the UBI and its relationship to *'The World'* has much to say about the way NRMs have developed. How they are viewed in the future – as a contributing part of the wider social order – rests on the argument made here: that all religions were, axiomatically, once NRMs.

Rather than seen as aberrant 'cults', apart from the world, NRMs are considered here as socio-cultural inventors and innovators, deserving of a more neutral and dispassionate assessment than they generally receive. In place of the endemic passionate and partisan 'cult' stereotyping, too often made without diligent investigation, this study undertakes a detailed review of the principal figures/founders whose lives intersected with this particular NRM; the concepts and beliefs they articulated, and the response they received within public media representations of the day.

As a cofounder of the movement the study draws on my own unpublished memoirs, as well as primary in-house publications, and media data never before interrogated. These sources are supplemented by interviews, to answer the plethora of mini-questions surrounding the central question: What roles do New Religious Movements (NRMs) and their often charismatic founders play in the social milieu of their time?



# Declaration

I declare that:

This thesis presents work carried out by myself and does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university.

To the best of my knowledge it does not contain any materials previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; and all substantive contributions by others to the work presented, including jointly authored publications, and multi-media presentations is clearly acknowledged.

A full autobiographical study (until meeting the Robinsons) was also produced as part of this research, but has been removed from the Thesis, in the interest of reducing its still substantial length.

.....

Stephen John Carthew





## Acknowledgments

Firstly, I wish to thank my wife Louise for her acceptance of my decision to do this research into an uncomfortable ‘past’ that could so easily have been left ‘in the past’.

There have been many people who have assisted me in compiling this study. While there are too many to name individually, I want to acknowledge the assistance of all the ex-members of the Universal Brotherhood and the current members of the Brooklands Community. Special appreciation goes to Margaret and Terry Miskimmin and their family, and Sam and Ruth Purves and their family, and David McAloney for his assistance with the images, many of which, as a past member of the UBI, were his own.

Thanks also to the friends and members of the Broun and Robinson families prepared to contribute to this research (some wishing to remain anonymous). Particular appreciation to Mary Broun-Robinson’s surviving sons Noel Broun and Graham Broun.

Many thanks to the voluntary readers of certain sections of the study; in particular Robin Sinclair, Maeve Archibald, Annelies Groothedde, Michael Mickan and Stevie Abbott-Richards; and especially Dr. Alduino Mazzone.

Thanks also go to all my lecturers and tutors at the University of South Australia who have assisted me since I began an undergraduate degree in 2001. Special thanks to my fellow student-colleagues who have been so helpful to this *late-onset* academic. Special thanks to Carolyn Bilsborow for her collaboration on the Robinsons and the UBI over both my Honours and PhD Candidatures, and for her technical assistance and friendship; and to Stuart Dinmore for his [www.fredrobinson.net.au](http://www.fredrobinson.net.au) website, and for his collegiality; and to Dr. Robert Bloomfield for his advice on conventions – and which ones might be amended for this project. Many thanks go to my Secondary Supervisor, Dr. Vicki Crowley, for her insightful comments and guidance.

My most special gratitude and appreciation goes to my Primary Supervisor, Dr. Jackie Cook, for her advice on the design and shape of the study; her assistance in helping me find a suitable narrator’s voice, and particularly for the many hours of painstaking editing in getting this project ready for examination and final submission.



# **Section I: Exploring the Territory, the Domains, and the Writing**

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

What role do New Religious Movements (NRMs) and their often charismatic founders play in the social milieu of their time? How do they recruit their adherents – and are some individuals, groups or even cultural moments more predisposed to certain types of NRMs than others? What do NRMs and their leaders contribute to society? How might a retrospective vision of such movements position their achievements, especially given the tendency for twenty-first century media reports to take a largely negative and critical stance to what they term ‘cults’, irrespective of their beliefs and practices (Cowan 2005, p. 318).

To answer these questions the lives of the founders of one ‘New Age, Back-to-the-land’ New Religious Movement, Australia’s Universal Brotherhood Incorporated (UBI), will be examined. Founded in 1963, under the direction of Fred Robinson and Mary Broun, their movement was recognised as the pre-eminent and most influential ‘New Age’ group during Australia’s Alternative, ‘New Age’ era – the 1970s. This study tracks the influences and the mindsets which Fred and Mary Robinson introduced to me as their then young ‘New Age’ protégé. As co-founder of this organisation, my ‘insider’ perspectives on its genesis fill gaps in the literature about how this movement’s schema evolved.

How it saw itself, how it was initially represented by the media of the day, and how it is positioned within the NRM networks of today, all contribute to understandings of what such movements ‘are’, and what they bring to the social and cultural order. The formative years of the founders, I argue, are vital in understanding why the movement developed as it did – but also capture something of how all such movements develop, and interact with the broader society.

A thumbnail history of this group helps to indicate why it should be considered a significant movement within Australia’s rich and often complex history of ‘alternative’ social and religious experiments. While van Sommers (1964), Smith and Crossley (1975), Drury and Tillett (1980), Black (1984), Metcalf (1995) and Malykke (1996)

recognise that the Robinsons and their artefact the Universal Brotherhood played a significant part in the ‘New Age’ and Communitarian history of Australia, no one has yet attempted an in depth history or understanding of the movement, let alone its genesis.

The following is an unpublished historical account of the UBI as told by Margaret Miskimmin, a former member of the Universal Brotherhood, and past Secretary of the present day Brooklands Community (which inherited the Communal property from the UBI). The document helps to introduce the group’s history. Margaret Miskimmin was briefly interviewed as part of an ABC *Compass* documentary, ‘The Brotherhood’ (Critchley 2009). Her short history of the movement broadly depicts it from 1971 – when my research ends – until the present. It acts as a synopsis of an often contradictory and sometimes confusing history of the group. Since this study explores the biographic and autobiographic pre-history of the movement, and is focussed more on analytic commentary than on historical narrative, a factual outline from a qualified third party is an appropriate opening gambit.

## **A Brief History of the UBI and the Brooklands Community**

This document was originally written by Margaret Miskimmin for a historical project undertaken in conjunction with the celebration in December 2004 of the hundredth anniversary of the ‘Homestead’, the building which housed the Universal Brotherhood’s sanctuary, dining room and kitchen from 1974–1988:

In 1971, as the ‘new age’ Movement was beginning to gather momentum in Australia, Fred Robinson *emerged* upon the scene. For more than a decade previously, Fred had been travelling Australia preaching his own version of the times and the changes that were taking place world-wide during the 1960s.

By 1973 (the year of the now famous first Nimbin Aquarius Festival)<sup>1</sup> Fred had gathered a following of roughly 50 adults, mostly single and in their twenties, who travelled to Western Australia where Fred and Mary Robinson’s New Age Information Centre, ‘Shalam’, was located in Armidale (29 km from Perth). Almost all these ‘seekers’ moved up north to a property named ‘Carranya’ near the wheat-belt town of Coorow (266 km from Perth), where for a couple of years the concept of a ‘New Age’

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<sup>1</sup> In 1972, scouts from the Australian Union of Students persuaded the Nimbin Progress Association to allow a 10 day Aquarius Festival to be held there in May 1973. It marked a watershed in Australian popular culture (<http://www.nimbinweb.com.au/nimbin/history/history2.htm>; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aquarius\\_Festival](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aquarius_Festival), accessed 10.12.2010). Fred Robinson spoke from a tent. Some receptive listeners decided to travel to Western Australia to put his teachings into practice.

Fraternity/Community was explored and developed. Thirteen disused railway carriages became the main accommodation units. During this time the group numbers expanded to over 100 people, including children, while the group became a legal association known as the Universal Brotherhood Incorporated (UBI).

In 1975, the group moved south to Balingup (308 km from Perth) buying a property of some 317 acres, living mainly in the railway carriages and caravans moved from Coorow, as well as renting houses in the local towns. Dams were built, a vineyard planted, the orchard and garden were put under organic cultivation, with cows, goats, sheep, chooks, ducks and bees being purchased, while 'fun nights' provided the internal entertainment. People married, babies were born and the number of children grew to 42, resulting in a primary school with a qualified teacher being established with Education Department approval. Homes began to go up, projects were initiated, concerts were held for locals, and tours were given. Literally thousands of people came to look and ask questions about a social experiment that became known as Australia's most successful 'New Age' community.

However, the basic rural lifestyle with 'new age' overtones and religious disciplines was not to everyone's taste. By the end of 1978 the membership of the community had halved, but with the number of children in ratio to adults increasing all the time. A school building was erected with the help of a Government Grant. The community explored the various alternative methods of education, including the Montessori<sup>2</sup> and Waldorf<sup>3</sup> systems.

In 1983, just before his 92<sup>nd</sup> birthday, Fred Robinson passed away, heralding the end of an era. Times were changing, but meantime trees continued to be planted, dams expanded, intra-community roads established and in 1985 the school opened its doors to children from the local district, following the educational principles of Rudolf Steiner. A College of Teachers was established; separate from the running of the Community. However, even though the numbers of the school increased over the next two years, it became obvious that the school could not support itself and at the end of 1989 the doors closed. The community children went out into the local district schools to further their education. Mary Robinson also died that year.

In a sense, as the 1990s dawned, in its original conception, the community living experiment was over and the Universal Brotherhood Incorporated was defunct. Nonetheless, another Community continues to this day on the site, albeit in a very different form. It is now known as the Brooklands Community. The membership has remained at approximately 20–24 for the past 15 years, incorporating six original members. Of course, children have grown up, and, for the most part, have moved on. The original orchard has disappeared, to be replaced with individual home gardens. The land, dams, fences and buildings have been maintained but there has been no expansion in 20 years. Meetings are held monthly but very little Community activity is noticeable, except for a monthly 'pot luck' dinner which rotates between members (Miskimmin 2009).

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<sup>2</sup> The Montessori Method is an approach to educating children based on the research and experiences of Italian physician and educator Maria Montessori (1870–1952) ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montessori\\_method](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montessori_method), accessed 10.12.2010).

<sup>3</sup> Waldorf education (also known as Steiner Education) is an approach to pedagogy based upon the educational philosophy of the Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner, the founder of Anthroposophy ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waldorf\\_education](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waldorf_education), accessed 10.12.2010).

This short history is supplemented by a more detailed Time-Line which details the main events recounted in the chapters (Print Appendix 1).

## **Why are the Biographies needed?**

Why isn't this enough? Or alternatively, why not write an expanded version of the history of the movement as recounted above, using the happenings of those times, and the voices of those who lived through them, to make observations about this New Religious Movement and NRM communities in general? The initial intention was indeed to write such a history. However, during the initial sketching of the historical biographies of Fred Robinson and Mary Broun-Robinson (née O'Dwyer), it became clear that the development of the Community was powerfully influenced by their former enthusiasms, and that the ethos and mind-set of the Universal Brotherhood might best be understood through extended biographies of the founders prior to the formation of the group.

## **The Robinsonian Voice**

Partisan stances taken by most stakeholders dominate the public debate about NRMs. Founders and members, angry ex-members, concerned parents, anticult/countercult theologians, psychologists involved in deprogramming and exit counselling rarely take a neutral stance (Saliba 2003). This is particularly true for the founders and leaders of NRMs who are also ex-members. The urge to justify 'the cause', prolong the movement or turn it into something else is hard to resist.

Given the dominance of proselytising or apologist stances on the one hand, and 'confessional' and 'exposé' stances on the other – both rich in the rhetoric of entrenched antagonism – it is imperative that the original voices of the Robinsons, and those who informed the schema they put to those who formed around them in the early 1970s, be presented alongside the formative texts, rather than assigned to scholarly appendices and so less likely to be accessed. The telling of the 'before story' of the UBI, using primary voices, is essential to a study which seeks to explore the origins and formation, as well as the development, of NRMs within their social, cultural and historical context. Without this unearthing of the formative influences upon a specific NRM – and the complex and on-going interconnections between such movements – understanding

remains over-fixated upon powerful, even messianic, ‘gurus’ or leaders, positioned as able to delude and exploit their (often young) followers. NRMs it will be argued, are inevitably more complex, and often less coherent and ‘centred’ than such accounts suggest.

## **Design of the Thesis**

This Introduction aims to ask the central questions informing the research for this study, setting the parameters and foregrounding issues that will emerge in the chapters. The introductory Section I (Exploring the Territory, the Domains and the Writing), aims to ask the central questions informing the research for this study, setting the parameters and foregrounding areas of interest that will emerge in the chapters. Some of the issues raised in Section I are designed to be mirrored and reviewed in Section IV (Publicity, Perception and Legacy). While the story-focussed chapters can be read by themselves, each with their own brief introduction and concluding commentary, the overall design sets the stories: Section II (Exhuming the Bio-histories), and Section III (New Age Praxis 1962-1971), within formally analytical work. Such analysis aims to make sense of the data-rich narrative, as well as attending to how that data is presented, and why.

To investigate the lives of the UBI founders requires a focus on a sustainable investigative methodology, literature review of studies of NRMs in general, and ways of examining societal responses to NRMs.

## **The Lives and Ideas of the Founders**

The lives and the developing ideas of the three *protagonist-founders* drive both the study and the issues under analysis, making clear why the research questions arise and evolve as they do. How past experiences and predispositions of the three protagonists are rearticulated during the life of the Universal Brotherhood is an important theme of the thesis – and this is built into the structure and content of the four chapters which are summarised here. An interrogation of the media representation of the Robinsons and their communal initiatives similarly develops a categorisation of the phases of media reporting and how it impacted upon broader Australian social perspectives on NRMs, and on the Universal Brotherhood’s life-cycle.

## **The Writing Style and the Methodology**

The way in which the study has been researched and written is part of the framing of this research. It involves discussions and theories on researching, reporting and analysing both broad-based social movements, and the biographies of their leaders. Here I position myself as an interdisciplinary researcher, consciously conducting a participatory inquiry (Heron 1971; Reason 1990; Reason & Bradbury 2008) into the interconnected lives of the Universal Brotherhood's founders, acknowledging my own presence and complicity in a shifting subjective-objective perspective, which drives the writing of the chapters to accommodate both 'insider' and 'outsider' positioning.

## **Research Literature**

Firstly the 'insider' literature in the various fields that informed the UBI is surveyed. While this primary literature is examined inside the narrative/biographic chapters, discussion of its use as a focus of analysis is provided in advance. Next, a review of the various fields of 'outsider' or secondary academic literature specifically relevant to the Universal Brotherhood is undertaken. This includes past research on the UBI, as well as a discussion of other Intentional Communities in Australia, and of the 'New Age' as a spiritual/religious movement in an Australian context. The study thus builds outwards, developing strands of interest produced within this 'New Age' NRM Community, and positioning them within broader national and international concerns. The study will also build inwards, bringing a critical and interpretive focus to more general questions of what NRMs are, and how they develop within a given social moment.

## **Societal Responses to NRMs**

Societal responses to New Religious Movements – their context – are thus an important part of the central question under examination here. The perceived contributions and dangers which NRMs are considered to bring to society will be examined – the UBI offering a case study which, in the relatively irreligious Australian social and cultural context, offers interesting insights into the formation and operations of modern NRMs. The study raises questions such as whether the excesses of socially irresponsible NRMs should be monitored and curbed, even as the rights/freedoms of socially responsible NRMs are protected. While the study does not set out to make any public policy recommendations, a documentary film made about the UBI during this research



indicates reviving interest in the Australian tradition of communally configured NRMs – and the need for greater understanding of such groups by society.

## **The Lives and Ideas of the Founders of the UBI**

Drawing on extant print media articles, in-house Community publications, and autobiographical texts that range from the 1930s to the latter part of 1971, this research sets out to record the work done by Fred Robinson and Mary Broun-Robinson in developing and publicising Australia's response to 'New Age' ideologies on one hand, and the *Back-to-the-land Organic Community Movement* on the other.

How an individual life is represented – especially one lived across many moments of public scrutiny – is a central issue within this research. While examining the life of Fred Robinson, the study explores the mood displayed within both the mainstream and the alternative press towards him, introducing some of his story via various versions of his own public representation of himself, as depicted by the many journalists who interviewed him. At stake is the possibility that these early 'New Age' narratives, developing in Australia through Fred Robinson's attempts at social reform, played a significant (but at least up until this research, largely invisible) role in culturally seeding the social and environmental *sustainability movement* of the early twenty-first century. Working alongside other more secular social innovations within the *green movement* and feminist social programs of reform, this research will suggest that together, these built foundations on which have been developed understandings recently gaining new levels of political currency in such influential interventions as Al Gore's documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006)<sup>4</sup>, a film that endorses much of what in Fred Robinson's career was considered 'prophecy'. What does it mean that such ideas recur, and how far is the invisible but continuing influence of figures such as the Robinsons a part of a discontinuous yet still coherent world view? The research confirms studies which attempt to depict the 1970s by way of the trope of social 'loosening' (Binkley 2007), the very opposite of the 'tightening' which the Robinsons were recommending to their

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<sup>4</sup> *An Inconvenient Truth* is a 2006 documentary film directed by David Guggenheim about former United States Vice Presidents Al Gore's campaigns about global warming, via a comprehensive slide show that, by his own estimate, he had given more than a thousand times. The documentary was a critical and box-office success, winning Academy Awards for Best Documentary Feature ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An\\_Inconvenient\\_Truth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An_Inconvenient_Truth), accessed 3.8 2010).

*alignees*, in regard to self-discipline and the upholding of traditional community standards in the face of what they saw as moral erosion.

How a person or group is represented in the public domain may not be strictly balanced, or fair, or even entirely factual, but it does define the general public's perception of who they are and what they are about (see studies on the formation of public opinion such as Erving Goffman 1959; 1974). Since it was Fred Robinson's goal to '*make a breakthrough into the mass consciousness*' (pers. comm. and lectures 1971) it is worthwhile following the ways in which the media, one of his main avenues for such contact, represented Fred, his *alignees* and the Communities he inspired from the 1930s until the present.<sup>5</sup>

Examining both mainstream and alternative press reports of Fred Robinson, the study suggests a double-trajectory within public perception of alternative social movements. There are those whose existing interests in social radicalism or cultural alternatives are endorsed and validated as formerly marginal ideas are taken up more broadly; and those whose new-found interest, piqued by media features in wide-circulation publications, leads them on into more specialised reading and activism. Thompson (1995) follows Lerner's classic work on social tradition and modernity (1958), describing the influence of media as a 'mobility multiplier':

[the media] make available to individuals a vast array of experiences that otherwise would have been unavailable to them, and they do so while obviating the need for physical travel. Moreover, precisely because mediated experience is vicarious experience, it cultivates the individual's faculty of imagination. The individual becomes increasingly capable of seeing himself or herself in the place of the other – in a new situation that may be radically different from his or her own. The rigidity of traditional ways of life begins to break down as individuals are confronted with alternatives that were previously unimaginable. Social life begins to seem more uncertain as individuals start to wonder what will happen next, rather than assuming that the future will resemble the past as it has always done (Thompson 1995, p. 189).

Thompson takes up Lerner's concept of 'empathy', describing how it 'enables individuals to distance themselves imaginatively from their immediate circumstances

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<sup>5</sup> Fred Robinson was the initiator of the Universal Brotherhood Community. Mary Broun-Robinson mainly avoided publicity, working behind the scenes to orchestrate their joint vision. While Mary was the self-proclaimed 'nucleus' or 'Principal' of the later UBI Community, it was Fred who was its public-figure head and its acknowledged instigator and 'prophet'/catalyst'.

and inclines them to take an interest in matters that do not bear directly on their day-to-day lives' (Thompson 1995, pp. 188–190). While Thompson is not uncritical of Lerner's position on the relatively simple binary between 'traditional' and 'modern' societies, seeing contemporary formations as far more complex and adaptive, his return to a recognition of media influences as central to the development of more pluralistic social world views remains compelling. It is particularly relevant to the mid-twentieth-century experience of the New Religious Movements traced in this study, where an otherwise isolated NRM Community, operating at a social moment of marked retreat from any expression or practice of religious or spiritual belief as a central social concern, were almost exclusively dependent upon media coverage to promulgate their various 'messages'. As this study proves, it was the mainstream media that disseminated Fred Robinson's teachings with Mary Broun-Robinson, both at Shalam New Age Information Centre, and on lecture tours during the 1960s. The process continued (coopting the support of the countercultural press and electronic media) with young volunteer publicity/press-agents (initially me) during the 1970s.

Reconstruction of these lives, and especially of the significance of these lives within the social influences of the day, is not however, this work will argue, limited or suppressed by the processing inside the narrative record. Here no one 'true' source is to be posited as holding a 'more accurate' representation than any other. While primary sources – Shalam and UBI publications,<sup>6</sup> original letters, and diaries, and new interviews – do work to convey 'the voice' of the *protagonist-participants*, other texts: media reports, interviews, published works about them, and my own reminiscences will also be examined.

The Robinsons' ideas and activities at Shalam and before were from the outset centred in text. Their views and ideals were constructed through the many literary influences and personal experiences which they both wrote of in their newsletters. This was to be extended through the teachings of the Universal Brotherhood Inc. as presented in its self-published literature, and in publicity increasingly generated in the national and

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<sup>6</sup> It is important to recognise the Shalam 1960s texts, and the UBI 1970s texts (especially through the influence of Mary Robinson's favoured UBI wordsmith David Fosdick (1975, pp. 183–184) as being of quite different *cultural-context-streams*. The former are artefacts of the *Pioneer New Age*; the latter incorporate more of the *baby-boomer counterculture* and *subjectivist-Findhornian New Age* ethos. Both stylistically and politically, the two sets of work are very different.

local press. The Robinsons' NRM was, if nothing else, a twentieth-century manifestation: one always acutely aware of the evangelical powers of the media – and yet ultimately a casualty of the media, or so this study will contend.

### **The Biographical Chapters**

The biographical research in this thesis starts with the *formative years of the founders* of the Universal Brotherhood (Section 2, Chapters 5–6). This is the period until Fred Robinson met Mary Broun in November 1962. Although in Fred's case this period is punctuated by bursts of media interest, the study of their years prior to meeting rests more on personal records of the life experiences and decisions of these two *first-founder-protagonists*. To ground their reminiscences and supporting documents and records, the roles of the groups they had aligned themselves with prior to their meeting are also explored. Their lives and the ideas at play within them are analysed with an eye to understanding the later development of the Universal Brotherhood Community. The question at stake is: 'What themes of these founders' lives and the groups they joined were carried into the New Religious Movement they formed?'

Secondly, the research focuses on the *inception years* of the Universal Brotherhood. This is the nine year period from the end of 1962 until the end of 1971, during which the Robinsons bought and established the property they called Shalam, soon recognised as Australia's foremost 'New Age Information Centre' (Chapters 7–11). Once again this period is punctuated with occasional publicity, but here the focus is on the New Age information and understandings which the Robinsons received through contact with other New Age groups worldwide, publishing it in their newsletter *Shalam Light*, putting the 'new knowledge' into practice in their own small way. Here they are seen to conceive and establish the principles by which the later Universal Brotherhood would function, via a 'prototype' of an 'alternative society': '*Our own small patch of heaven on earth*' as Fred enthused (1971, pers. comm.).

Thirdly, a brief discussion of my own autobiography leads into the more detailed tracing of the first few months of my association with the Fred Robinson, while recounting and analysing the media interest generated during the public lectures aimed at the *New Agers* prior to the formation of a formal group (Section 3, Chapter 12). The

record ends on New Year's Day 1972 when the first group of communards went to Carranya, 300 Kilometres north of Perth.

As Fred's publicist, and then later as the 'Preacher' of the UBI (Black 1984); the examination of some of the experiences I had in the New Age milieu just prior to linking-up with the Robinsons helps analyse why those of my generation followed the Robinsons to the UBI Community project that was to evolve. Formative influences, it will be argued, created predispositions towards both communal living and alternative social practice, and self-development regimes which were shared by many of my generation, led us to support what became known as the New Age movement. Notwithstanding a shift in New Age hermeneutics, from themes focussed on global apocalypse by the between-the-Wars 'pioneer' progenitors, to those of self-realisation by the baby-boomer inheritors (Sutcliffe 2003, pp. 114–118) it appeared possible in instances like the UBI Community, to fuse the two.

### **Phases of Media Representation**

At one level, a simple chronology of the Community's development after Fred Robinson's emergence from relative obscurity to public recognition (1971–1975), reveals the degree to which media coverage influenced both the communal focus, and the central beliefs espoused. The period immediately following Fred's most significant emergence in 1971 reveals what can be considered the *ascendancy publicity phase of Fred Robinson*. From 1972 until the move from Carranya to Balingup (in late 1974) Fred Robinson's schemata, while still represented as extreme and therefore newsworthy, were given serious media coverage in Australia. This period includes many representations of Fred's eccentric personal appearance and demeanour, and his *counter-counter-cultural* anti-drug teaching at the Nimbin Aquarian Festival (May 1973). The public were encouraged to view Fred as the figurehead and most dominant newsworthy feature of the movement that grew around him. Press articles and television coverage, examined here, tended to be focussed on 'Fred's story' and ideas – extreme, generationally unlikely, and therefore newsworthy examples of many of the socio-political tropes of the day.

The period after the move to Balingup (in the South-West of WA) until the Jonestown mass-suicide/murder in Guyana (November 1978),<sup>7</sup> represents the *ascendancy publicity phase of the Universal Brotherhood Community*. Here the focus had clearly shifted to the development of the Community. Fred Robinson, although still honoured as a figurehead, was publicly outshone by the performance of the Community itself – often represented as the most successful and cohesive alternative community in Australia (see Drury and Tillett 1980; Black 1984; Metcalf 1995; Malykke 1996; Aisbett 2006; Critchley 2009). Until Jonestown, and despite the fall of the socially progressive Whitlam Government in 1975,<sup>8</sup> alternative communal living projects remained prominent in mainstream Australian thinking (see Metcalf 1995). As such they were still a viable and largely positive media focus; and this was so despite a media campaign led by a disaffected parent of a member of the Universal Brotherhood during the middle 1970s, accusing the group of practising mind-control and witchcraft. Although full analysis of this episode is beyond the scope of this study, media reporting of the day helps give an idea of the negative tone of the publicity.

**A Zombie Cult – or a New Utopia?** Parents are having nightmares over Fred’s Dream. Perth – An 84 year old Englishman with a kindly smile and a persuasive tongue is behind a weird religious sect which, a father claimed this week turned his daughter into a mindless zombie. He is Fred Robinson self-proclaimed Moses of the Universal Brotherhood, who lives with his wife and 100 followers in a West Australian commune.<sup>9</sup>

After Jonestown media reporting of NRMs, even in Australia, became much more cautious and suspicious, and more likely to produce negatively-slanted and sensationalised copy. Until then press reporters and media producers remained largely positive about what UBI members were doing in the Community. Members of the same

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<sup>7</sup> Jonestown was the informal name for the People’s Temple Agricultural Project, an intentional community in north-western Guyana formed by the People’s Temple, led by Jim Jones. It became internationally notorious when, on November 18, 1978, 918 people died in the settlement as well as in a nearby airstrip and in Georgetown, Guyana’s capital. The name of the settlement became synonymous with the incidents at those locations (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jonestown>, accessed, 27.2.2011).

<sup>8</sup> The 1975 Australian constitutional crisis (sometimes called ‘The Dismissal’) has been described as the greatest political crisis and constitutional crisis in Australian history. It culminated on 11 November 1975, with the removal of the Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam of the Australian Labor Party (ALP), by Governor General Sir John Kerr. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1975\\_Australian\\_constitutional\\_crisis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1975_Australian_constitutional_crisis), accessed 27. 2.2011).

<sup>9</sup> For ethical reasons I am not revealing the name of the parents, the ex-member’s name, date or source of this article.

generation and social moment, many media reporters wrote as if they wanted to believe that we could ‘make a difference’ and create ‘a working model’ for a new social order. However, after the unprecedented and unexpected loss of life at Jonestown, a ‘cult’ stereotype quickly became entrenched or ‘emplotted’, in Ricoeurian terms (1984)<sup>10</sup> into almost all reporting of New Religious Movements and their Communities (confer also Robbins 2003; Hall 2003).

The next period – post Jonestown (November 1978) until Fred died in April 1983 – reveals a more *plateauing publicity phase*. Since there were few negative media stories about the Universal Brotherhood, and since the UBI had not imploded as the ex-members of a schism group had suggested after they left in 1977, the media simply went quiet on the Universal Brotherhood. There was little to say. Even so, the local weekly *South West Times* continued to run Mary Robinson’s letters and other newsworthy stories – which were largely positive.

Of over one hundred press publications traced for this study in the Australian press archives from 1971 until Fred died in 1983, less than a dozen can be adjudged openly hostile. Over two dozen of the overall number of texts in the archive were Letters-to-the-Editor from Mary Robinson or members of the UBI on such varied subjects as proclaiming the UBI a Nuclear Free Zone; supporting Trade Unions; ‘cult’ deprogramming; pornography; smoking; the banning of agricultural chemicals; and the sexualisation of children’s toys such as in Barbie Dolls. The remainder were reports and feature articles on Fred Robinson and/or the UBI Community and its activities, such as the development of the Community school.

After the news stories focussing on Fred’s death in 1983, until Mary’s death in 1989, there followed a period which can be considered the *declining publicity phase* of the Universal Brotherhood Community. After Mary’s death in 1989 the Community, as originally conceived, effectively became defunct. Accounts of the UBI from then until the present time involve a *retrospective phase*. The latest bout of publicity for instance

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<sup>10</sup> Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) was a French Philosopher whose constant preoccupation was with a hermeneutic of the self, fundamental to which is the need we have for our lives to be made intelligible to us. Ricoeur’s flagship in this endeavour is his narrative theory (<http://www.iep.utm.edu/ricoeur/>, accessed, 27.2.201).

the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's screening of their documentary 'The Brotherhood' in February 2009 as the first of a series of 21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary Programmes of their religious current affairs series *Compass*. It was again screened in June 2010.<sup>11</sup>

## Paul Ricoeur's '*Emplotted*' Influence

The successive transformation of Robinsonian thought and the UBI's activities reveal radical shifts in the ways that Australian social commentary – at least as represented in mainstream media reporting – 'emplotted' or narrativised NRMs. This study takes up Ricoeur's theorisation of how narratives arise from and feed back into distinctive social perspectives of their day (1984). Ricoeur's concept of narrativised thinking and emplotment informs this study:

The basic elements of narrative thinking are *episodes*, or particularly narrated events. Of course, narrative thinking does not merely collect episodes; such a collection would not be a story. Narrative thinking synthesises a manifold of episodes into an intelligible whole or 'thought' through the *plot* as a structural principle of order. Emplotment of episodes is a synthesis of the heterogeneous, a submitting of discordant events to a principle of temporal order or concordance. A story is followable when a reader understands how and why the successive episodes lead to its conclusion. The followability of narrative thus bridges the theoretical aporia between cosmic time and lived time, rendering the fragile mixture that Ricoeur calls 'human time' as 'narrated time' (Klemm 2008, p. 58).

Ricoeur himself notes that his major contribution to understandings of how narrative is constructed has been to expose

... the relations between the writing of history and the operation of emplotment, which Aristotle elevated to the work of the dominant category in the art of composing works that imitate an action (Ricoeur 1984, p. 227).

For Ricoeur, it is the narrative impulse: creative arrangement of experiences or events into meaningful sequences, which produces both 'factual' or historical record narratives and their imaginative 'fictional' counterparts.

We can say that fiction is quasi-historical, just as much as history is quasi-fiction. History is quasi-fiction once the quasi-presence of events placed "before the eyes of" the reader by a lively narrative supplements through its intuitiveness, its vividness, the

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<sup>11</sup> The transcript remains on the *Compass* website: <<http://www.abc.net.au/compass/s2484490.htm>>, while further information about the program, can be viewed at <<http://abc.com.au/tv/guide/netw/200902/programs/RN0811H003D22022009T212500.htm>> accessed 6.7.2011).



elusive character of the pastness of the past, which is illustrated by the paradoxes of standing-for. Fictional narrative is quasi-historical to the extent that the unreal events that it relates are past facts for the narrative voice that addresses itself to the reader. It is in this that they resemble past events and that fiction resembles history (Ricoeur 1988, p. 190).

It is the pre–and–post interpretation: our capacity to imagine events and sequences which have *not* occurred, as much as our drive to make sure of those which have, which operate within the many shifts of ‘emplotment’ encountered in the Robinsonian record – both their own and others’ interpretations.

Paul Ricoeur is known for his development of philosophical anthropology, combining phenomenological description with hermeneutic interpretation. For this hermeneutic phenomenology, whatever is intelligible is accessible to us in and through language, and all deployments of language call for interpretation (Dauenhauer 2011). For Ricoeur the validation of an interpretation is not simply its empirical verification, but its vindication against competing interpretations (ibid.). In this way validation ‘is an argumentative discipline more comparable to the judicial procedures of legal interpretation. It is a logic of uncertainty and qualitative probability’ (Ricoeur 1991, p. 159). Thus, despite the many conflicting interpretations about the Robinsons’ work, their artefact the UBI and my own part in the organisation – and the part that NRMs might play in society – it is possible to find criteria, such as comprehensiveness, for determining which interpretation is more likely. There are of course times when more than one interpretation will satisfy the criteria equally well, while some interpretations have little or no likelihood (Dauenhauer 2011). Hence, as Ricoeur states in *From Text to Action* (1991):

If it is true that there is always more than one way of construing a text, it is not true that all interpretations are equal... The text is a limited field of possible constructions. The logic of validation allows us to move between the two limits of dogmatism and scepticism. It is always possible to argue against an interpretation, to confront interpretations, to arbitrate between them and to seek for an agreement, even if this agreement remains beyond our reach (p. 160).

This study is dedicated to such arbitration of interpretation as regards the placing of, and the contributions of the Robinsons, the place and contribution of the UBI as an Australian NRM, and the way New Religious Movements might be more profitably seen by society at large. While my interpretations of NRMs are not ‘new’, they do

support arguments that focus on their innovative social contributions, as opposed to the dangers that such marginal contemporary religious movements are more often held to present to society.

Ricoeur's theorisations, while far reaching in their social implication, are grounded in his perspective on 'the self':

For Ricoeur, the self is essentially embodied. It is, on the one hand, both made possible and constituted by its material and cultural situation. But, on the other hand, it is in principle always capable of initiative, of inaugurating something new. More importantly, the self is what answers the question "'Who?': Who spoke, who did this, who said this, who is this?' As such it has a personal identity and is open to different descriptions (Dauenhauer 2011).

This study seeks to engage with the two above principles simultaneously. Firstly, an exploration of the historical and cultural milieu in which the Robinsons lived; including the cultures of groups that shaped them prior to the formation of the UBI. The sociologist Colin Campbell (1972) used the term 'cultic milieu' to describe the interconnective cultural matrix from which NRMs were, and are still being continually formed; and into which some – like the UBI – eventually disintegrate. Secondly, the Robinsons' creative initiative and personal agency – 'of inaugurating something new' (including such agency identified in the founders of the groups which influenced the Robinsons' lives and were included in their schemata).

It is the answering of the 'Who?' questions (as in the above citation), which drives the biographical life-writing about the Robinsons; while the cultural, historical and attesting data, supplemented by a critique of media representations, can be seen as grounding the text in the day-to-day reality of the Robinsons' history. It is also the dual nature of my own *insider* yet *outsider* status: personally attesting and reflecting, yet politically critiquing and analysing the tensions between the cultural/historical *situations* and personal/philosophic *agency* – which together help to make this study epistemologically Ricoeurian.

The evidence that Ricoeur cites to support the claim that the self inhabits two orders of causality comes not from empirical verification but from *attestation*. Attestation is the sort of lived assurance or confidence that each person has of existing in both of these orders of causality. This assurance is a kind of belief but one based on credence or trust rather than a logical certitude. It is the confidence that the self has in its ability to act and to suffer, to do and undergo things that it can impute to itself as its own doings and

sufferings. The evidential validity of attestation as distinct from verification is crucial for Ricoeur's entire anthropology. Without it, he would have no basis for insisting, with Kant, that persons are irreducibly different from things (Dauenhauer 2011).

It has been necessary to exhume and forensically examine and critique the 'attesting' Robinsonian archives, while also analysing their media (mis)representations – both of which I argue helped shape Australia's New Age movement of the 1960s and 1970s. These texts are best understood when interpreted in the context of the times in which they occurred; and with an understanding of the media commentators' 'emplotment' – both at the time of writing and in today's retrospective media productions. Prior to this study, the anticult narratives of ex-members of the UBI have tended to subsume 'lost' historical voices, enshrined in both the Robinsonian texts, and those who reflect mainly positively on the movement and the UBI's 1970s experiences (mainly beyond the scope of this study). Having been a 'believer', and still being a 'respector' of the Robinsons' positions, is in the eyes of Ricoeur an advantage to the task of interpreting and understanding:

We must believe in order to understand: never, in fact does the interpreter get near to what the text says unless he lives in the aura of the meaning he is inquiring after (Ricoeur 1967, pp. 353).

To resurface the lost generative texts (those which shaped the UBI), this study is an exercise in narrated archival *bricolage*. As bricoleur I tell the story of the Robinsons' trajectory, piecing together past historical and cultural moments. Through this textual 'act' the Robinsons are revealed as cultural change agents and social innovators – catalysts of a uniquely *eclectically-Australian* New Age movement – and before the term 'new age' was in general use.

... the historical present is the time of actions, the time of the inaugurations of new sequences and arrangements of things. It is also the moment framed by the agent's space of experience and horizon of expectation (Dauenhauer 2011).

To express the complex biographical pasts within a form that seeks to encapsulate a 'historical present', I have employed the kind of discourse which can articulate strings of actions and events in relation to their human contexts. The kind of discourse most able to do this is narrative – 'where historical time becomes human time' (ibid.). By creating a narrative of the Robinsons' lives and efforts, exploring just how they turned ideals and ideas into praxis/action, the narrative further seeks to speak to present

conditions, both within the world of NRMs, and also within the world in which present day NRMs must live and interact. In this way the biographical chapters seek to fulfil Ricoeur's idea about historical text: 'to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full significance when it becomes a condition of temporal existence' (Ricoeur 1984, p. 52).

It has been the purpose of this study to try recapture 'lost' *historical time*, and to (re)present it as 'human time' for the purpose of creating an 'interpersonal, public time'. This allows for both a more appropriate placement of the UBI within Australian NRM history, and a greater understanding of the social, cultural, environmental and spiritual precursors of a range of contemporary impulses of import in 2011.

The historical time that narrative presents, i.e., human time as it unfolds in time, is an interpersonal, public time. It is the time in which one can locate sequences of generations and the traces their lives have left behind. Furthermore, it is the time in which debts to predecessors have been incurred. Indeed, Ricoeur holds that without at least a latent sense of such indebtedness to our predecessors, history would be meaningless (Dauenhauer 2011).

Returning to journalists' 'emplotment' of contemporary cultural 'thought' in their narratives, one can understand why it is not so easily detected at the time, for it plays to already emplotted cultural positions and biases. Much like a tapestry, the weft covers up the warp and the knotted threads. Only when the tapestry is reversed can the warp and the connecting knots be seen. When historical texts, with the benefit of hindsight, are (re)examined, deconstructed, and then reconstructed, with an understanding of the emplotment of cultural thought at the time of writing – only then can interpretation be 'comprehensive'. By reading and analysing the Robinsons' literary influences and what Ricoeur would term their own 'culturally discordant' publications, alongside the extant 'culturally concordant' print media reports of the day, the shifting emplotment of 'cultural thought' threaded through the public domain narratives is revealed. Positions may not have been obvious to mainstream audiences at the time of writing – for they were 'culturally concordant', or in line with the social, religious, life-style hegemony.

The literary act of analysing past *tapestry-like* media texts about the Robinsons (particularly Fred) becomes a method of researching the UBI, and all NRMs, before they come into existence. By unthreading and then rethreading some of the emplotted

themes in the ‘warp’ of the religious, political, economic, spiritual scientific, dietary, prophetic and UFO narratives which shaped and activated the Robinsons’ beliefs, positions, stances and actions – along with the media’s take on them – the UBI is likely to be better understood. By extension the way NRMs are configured within society is also more able to be understood. The broader society can be positioned to be more responsive to the issues NRMs present. By exposing the emplotment of ‘cult’ discourse in narratives about the Robinsons and their UBI, and the world of NRMs more generally, there is more chance that a cultural shift to a more sympathetic, even empathetic, emplotment could occur.

Having said this, exposing the largely negative emplotment of ‘cult’ and ‘anticult’ discourse, while useful, is a relatively small part of this study. More important is the development of a narrative voice and style that strives for a sympathetic listening to original voices – a friendly but neutral stance which will mark the writing of the chapters that follow. While being critical of the Robinsons’ mistakes, the study shows such errors as part of the human condition – mistakes produced in all domains of society by fallible humans, rather than a result of ‘cult’ association/causation which are *ipso facto* inimical to society.

While there is much more that could be said about Ricoeur’s theorisations as they relate to my attempts to write about the Robinsons and the UBI, his concepts show that my attempts are likely to be only partially representative (and at times misrepresentative) of Fred and Mary Robinson and the movement they spawned:

Throughout his career Ricoeur worked to make sense of the past and our ongoing involvement with it. Something about the past is undoubtedly no longer accessible to us. Nonetheless, traces of the past remain. Through them we try to represent the past in the present. We do so through memory and through the writing and reading of history. But memory is notoriously fallible and historical accounts, since they cannot represent the past just as it was, are at best only partial and are therefore subject to the charge that they misrepresent, rather than represent, the past (Dauenhauer 2011).

Having explored the epistemological stream of Ricoeurian theorisation and its meta-methodological influence, it is necessary to focus on the various methods/ways in which the research will be undertaken, explaining these secondary methodological influences and the reasons for their deployment in this project.



## Chapter 2: Writing as a Methodology for Social Investigation

The way in which the thesis has been researched, written and constructed is central to the analysis it contains. The writing, which includes texts by both Fred and Mary Robinson, reveals multiple identities produced in the many lives of the Universal Brotherhood experience. A shifting subjective-objective methodology driving the writing accommodates both ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ perspectives – and as primary researcher, I include materials and insights generated both directly and experientially, as a UBI member, and from published texts, interviews and informal communication with the Robinsons’ affiliates.

### The Use of Wikipedia

Before launching into the methodological streams which underpinned or influenced the way this study was undertaken, it is important to address the issue of why the research uses the most popular online ‘community encyclopaedia’ Wikipedia.<sup>12</sup> Still not generally considered a fully peer-referenced academic source, Wikipedia is used here for its capacity to disseminate the kinds of knowledge which have been a central source of authority and connection to NRMs.

There are of course a number of complicating factors associated with the use of Wikipedia in scholarship. The issue of reliability of entries is the most important consideration. Firstly it is useful to note Wikipedia’s own policy regarding reliability:

Wikipedia articles should be based on reliable, published sources, making sure that all majority and significant minority views that have appeared in those sources are covered ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Identifying\\_reliable\\_sources](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Identifying_reliable_sources), accessed 19.5.2012).

It is understandable that a largely voluntary organisation like Wikipedia will be unable to assure that their policies are always followed by editors – some of whom may have a

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<sup>12</sup> Wikipedia is a free, web-based, collaborative, multilingual encyclopaedia project supported by the non-profit Wikimedia Foundation. Its 18 million articles (over 3.5 million in English) have been written collaboratively by volunteers around the world, and almost all of its articles can be edited by anyone with access to the site (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia>, accessed 28.2.2011). I have left the trademark Wikipedia *intra-links* within the above quotations, so that other issues such as ‘verifiability’ and ‘No original research’ can be followed.

vested interest in contested entries. While some of these contested entries are in the domain of NRMs, it became clear to me as I undertook the research that on balance Wikipedia was the broadest and most neutral site from which to gain an overview of a specific group, person or issue – especially uncontested historical trajectories, facts, and professed beliefs, along with media articles which have determined the emplotment of certain positions in society generally. Wikipedia’s own policy about their efforts to remain neutral is instructive:

Editing from a **neutral point of view (NPOV)** means representing fairly, proportionately, and as far as possible without bias, all significant views that have been published by reliable sources. All Wikipedia articles and other encyclopedic content must be written from a neutral point of view. NPOV is a fundamental principle of Wikipedia and of other Wikimedia projects. This policy is nonnegotiable and all editors and articles must follow it.

‘Neutral point of view’ is one of Wikipedia’s three core content policies. The other two are ‘Verifiability’ and ‘No original research’. These three core policies jointly determine the type and quality of material that is acceptable in Wikipedia articles. Because these policies work in harmony, they should not be interpreted in isolation from one another, and editors should try to familiarise themselves with all three. The principles upon which this policy is based cannot be superseded by other policies or guidelines, or by editors’ consensus.

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral\\_point\\_of\\_view](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view), accessed 19.5.2012). I have left the trademark Wikipedia *intra-links* within the quotations in this Wikipedia section, so that related issues such as ‘verifiability’ and ‘No original research’ can be followed. I have not left the many live intra-links in the other footnotes.

While an article could be significantly changed overnight – perhaps to its detriment; as a constantly updated online encyclopaedia, the quick uploading of vital information in Wikipedia’s entries is a decided plus for a researcher. For instance, when a person who has a Wikipedia article written on them dies, it is most likely that that entry will be changed the day after their death.

The admitted limits to the use of Wikipedia – ones which they too recognise – should be addressed here. This research does not *rely* on Wikipedia entries; rather it *employs* Wikipedia’s secondary source compilations (mainly as footnotes), to expeditiously summarise a range of secondary information, and to provide an on-the-page-portal for further reader-directed research. It is precisely *because* my own research presents so much primary *Robinsonian* data, while also including observations about my findings, that I wished to be as brief as possible regarding the already researched (but nonetheless important) secondary data. The tightly edited *Wikipedial-footnotes* about groups,



people, events, issues and texts, become a method of briefly informing the reader, and providing context for the original new data supplied. A reader can, simply by sight, immediately distinguish the secondary (perhaps flawed) source information, from the primary-source research of the main text – where primary and secondary sources are supplied through references. Wikipedia’s rationale for its policy on its ‘sources’, and the limitations for its reliability is useful:

Wikipedia articles should be based mainly on reliable secondary sources. ...  
Tertiary sources such as compendia, encyclopaedias, textbooks, obituaries, and other summarising sources may be used to give overviews or summaries, but should not be used in place of secondary sources for detailed discussion. Although Wikipedia articles are tertiary sources, Wikipedia employs no systematic mechanism for fact checking or accuracy. Because Wikipedia forbids original research, there is nothing reliable in it that isn’t citable with something else. Thus Wikipedia articles (or Wikipedia mirrors) are not reliable sources for any purpose.  
Primary sources are often difficult to use appropriately. While they can be both reliable and useful in certain situations, they must be used with caution in order to avoid original research. Material based purely on primary sources should be avoided. All interpretive claims, analyses, or synthetic claims about primary sources must be referenced to a secondary source, rather than original analysis of the primary-source material by Wikipedia editors  
([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Identifying\\_reliable\\_sources](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Identifying_reliable_sources), accessed 19.5.2012).

The study of the data within this research, by necessity broad-ranging in scope, within and across so many fields, means finding reference sources which are brief – at footnote length; neutral, rather than partisan; and expressed in Plain English.<sup>13</sup> With so many esoteric – and often exotic – sources articulating into the Robinsons’ UBI movement and its beliefs, many of them producing their own pseudo-scientific specialist discourses, a less opaque, more disengaged language is needed, to report and to analyse these influences. To manage the sheer volume of cross-referenced UBI influences, the majority of the informing footnotes in the Chapters employ Wikipedia. But can Wikipedia be justified as a conscious part of the research for an academic project?

In this case for very specific reasons, I argue that they can. The following Wikipedia texts on ‘New Age’, ‘Intentional Community’ and ‘New Religious Movement’ are good examples of why Wikipedia has been of value in this research. In each case the short

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<sup>13</sup> Plain English ... is a generic term for communication styles that emphasise clarity, brevity and the avoidance of technical language. The intention is to write in a manner that is easily understood by its target audience: appropriate to their reading skills and knowledge, clear and direct, free of cliché and unnecessary jargon ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plain\\_English](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plain_English), accessed 18.1.2011).

explication reveals the eclecticism of the entire New Age. The various forms of Intentional Communities and New Religious Movements are summarised in a few sentences, meaning that what can otherwise appear as complex, self-defining entities, become available for comparative study. Knowledge previously locked up in what were often arcane texts, allusive and even consciously mystificatory, is now available to all. Three Wikipedia texts help make the point:

**The New Age** ... is a decentralised Western social and spiritual movement that seeks ‘Universal Truth’ and the attainment of the highest individual human potential. It includes aspects of occultism, astrology, esotericism, metaphysics, alternative medicine, music, collectivism, sustainability, and nature. New Age spirituality is characterised by an individual approach to spiritual practices and philosophies ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New\\_Age](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Age), accessed 4.7.2010).

**An Intentional Community** is a planned residential community designed to have a much higher degree of teamwork than other communities. The members of an intentional community typically hold a common social, political, religious or spiritual vision and are often part of the alternative society. They typically also share responsibilities and resources. Intentional communities include cohousing communities, eco-villages, communes, survivalist retreats, kibbutzim, ashrams and some housing cooperatives. Typically, new members of an intentional community are selected by the community’s existing membership ... ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intentional\\_community](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intentional_community), accessed 18.1.2011 ).

**A new religious movement** (NRM) is a religious community or ethical, spiritual, or philosophical group of modern origin. NRMs may be novel in origin or they may be part of a wider religion, such as Christianity, Hinduism or Buddhism, in which case they will be distinct from pre-existing denominations. Scholars studying the sociology of religion have almost unanimously adopted this term as a neutral alternative to the word “cult”. They continue to try to reach agreement on definitions and boundaries ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New\\_religious\\_movement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_religious_movement), accessed 18.1.2011).

Despite the objectivity behind the presentation of information in each of these extracts, a clear eclecticism is evident in each – and this study argues that it is a foundational emphasis in the cultural biases of NRMs. Few produce entirely new ‘beliefs’, mostly affiliating to or subsuming existing ‘*revealed knowledge*’ or adapting it to their own perspectives or applications. Further: the new and rapid availability of such definitions via Wikipedia alters the ways these social formations can be studied. The Universal Brotherhood for instance can be described as a ‘New Age Intentional Community’ rather than a ‘New Religious Movement’. The Wikipedia entry on NRMs is broad enough to class the UBI as an NRM (even if the word ‘religious’ does not describe the group for some ex-members). The categorisation thus preserves the debate over such

definitions, at the same time as offering them relatively stable categories – a useful duality in a study such as this. Then, when it comes to backgrounding the many groups contacted by the UBI founders, Wikipedia’s ‘secondary source’ editorial methodology provides more succinct and clearly written data than the primary sources that lie behind definitions, too often convoluted and/or partisan.

Further to the above considerations, the multiple and detailed citations in Wikipedia are helpful in locating primary sources – many of them in this field either chronically out of print, or published by small specialist presses with limited distribution. While this study deletes the primary references and links for the sake of simplicity within the Wikipedia references used, any interested on-line reader will be able to follow the single reference link to find those embedded reference sources. There is however an even more important innovation within NRM study, in relation to the use of Wikipedia. This relatively easy, non-specialist access means that *esotericism* in the age of the *online information explosion* is difficult to maintain, even by arcane groups who actively seek obscurity. This accessible flow of information has clear implications for New Religious Movements – issues that will be examined across the biographical/historical chapters on the co-founders, as the various sources contributing to the UBI’s beliefs and practices are traced.

Involvement in this eclectic community of knowledge-builders, recorders and definers, once articulated through figures such as the Robinsons and their ideological labour as founders of a New Age ‘Centre of Light’, is thus now more immediately open to anyone predisposed to such ideas – a shift with implications for NRM development. At the same time the multiple influences on NRMs, made obvious and even transparent in Wikipedia entries, indicates the degree to which any study of their development will require a markedly broad-based form of research.

## **Interdisciplinarity**

The study of NRMs is itself an interdisciplinary field: a domain which traverses traditional boundaries of academic disciplines and schools of thought. The field of research include Agronomy, Anthropology, Cultural Studies, Dietetics, Ecology, Economics, Environmentalism, Epistemology, History, Media Studies, Metaphysics,

Philosophy, Psychology, Religious Studies, Social Science, Socio-Linguistics, Theology, and even *Ufology*.

While the disciplines and the focus they bring remain crucial, in a project such as this which crosses so many issues, disciplinary *knowledges* need to be utilised without being exclusive or dictatorial – ‘cult’ like behaviour. Roberta Frank (1988) comments:

‘Interdisciplinarity’ has something to please everyone. Its base, ‘discipline’, is hoary and antiseptic; its prefix ‘inter’, is hairy and friendly (p. 100).

Both characterisations speak to the needs of this study. While the word ‘discipline’ means both a branch of learning or a body of knowledge, and the maintenance of order and control, these two meanings have converged from the first half of the fifteenth century (Moran 2002, p. 2), producing categories of controlled and managed knowledge for dissemination and inculcation. ‘Discipline’ in this context suggests at one level a particular type of training, aimed at teaching proper conduct, order and self-control. In this respect the very notion of the term as a recognised mode of learning implies both the establishment of hierarchy, and the operation of power. It derives from the Latin, *disciplina*, which refers to the instruction of disciples by their elders, and necessarily alludes to a specialised, valued knowledge, which some people possess, while others do not (ibid).

Interdisciplinarity then becomes a demanding concept: one which ‘suggests something rigorous, aggressive, hazardous to master; [while] Inter hints that knowledge is a warm, mutually developing, consultative thing’ (Frank 1988, p. 100). In this sense of the term ‘interdisciplinarity’ can be seen as providing ‘a democratic, dynamic and cooperative alternative to the old-fashioned, inward-looking, clique nature of disciplines’ (Moran 2002, p. 3) – or, indeed, of popular views of NRMs.

Employing an interdisciplinary approach is easier to talk about however than to do. There are equally strong reasons against the interdisciplinary approach. Bill Readings in *The University in Ruins* (1996) actively challenges ‘interdisciplinarity’, suggesting that contemporary Western Universities have become transnational, bureaucratic corporations, (re)organised around the pursuit of profit and an empty notion of ‘excellence’. The malleable nature of the term ‘interdisciplinarity’ can too easily be

appropriated by a market-oriented university's programs of study, merging departments, cost-cutting and down-sizing, rather than prompting intellectual dialogue and cooperation between disciplines (Moran 2002, p. 182–3).

Negotiating an interdisciplinary study poses risks however to those traditions of rigorous data collection and analysis fostered in discipline-based research. Hall Foster notes, 'Today so much work that purports to be interdisciplinary seems to be non-disciplinary to me' (1998, p. 162). Moran suggests that too much contemporary interdisciplinarity lapses into 'an intellectual free-for-all rather than ground breaking forms of scholarship' (2002, p. 183). The need to accept 'the inevitability of disciplinary knowledge before attempting to move beyond it' (ibid.) is clear, albeit difficult to apply in the case of the New Age and NRM domains which are themselves simultaneously eclectic yet arcane in their knowledge sources.

Distinguishing between *interdisciplinarity* and *cross-disciplinarity*, *multi-disciplinarity*, *trans-disciplinarity*, *meta-disciplinarity* and even *super-disciplinarity* – all terms used to describe nuances of meaning – requires careful discussion about what is meant by 'interdisciplinarity' in this research. A project such as this appropriates many disciplines, fields, territories, domains, spaces, places and arenas of life. In part the study seeks to locate a 'bio-historical before-story' of the UBI; a study that might say something about how such movements and organisations are shaped by the protagonists' earlier lives. It also however has the potential to examine any positive contributions made to society at large by the Robinsons and the Universal Brotherhood (as cultural innovators). A clearer assessment of the foibles and the weaknesses of the UBI should not therefore be read as inevitably producing a negative critique of this, or of all NRMs. The complexity of these issues will be teased out by braiding the bio-histories of the founders of this 'Alternative Society' within the fields of the 'New Age', 'Intentional Communities' and 'New Religious Movements' – examining them across the matrix of interwoven disciplines. Adding to this complexity is the awareness that the subject matter contains sensitive issues and material.

## **Addressing a Sensitive Research Topic**

Some ex-members of the Universal Brotherhood retain bad memories of their time in the Community. Ex-members of NRMs worldwide have had painful reasons to condemn the groups they once supported, reifying the ‘cult’ stereotype this study is trying to avoid. On the other hand, NRMs themselves perennially feel persecuted by an accusing press, unprepared to hear their side of such stories. Research methodology needs to take these matters into consideration. This work does not seek to be an overt (or even a subtle) white-wash of the Robinsons, or of me as cofounder, or of the Universal Brotherhood as an NRM; nor should it turn however into ‘confessional’ memoir, or a bland description of three lives which avoids real issues as they arise. Remaining aware of the sensitivities of all the stakeholders, including my own, calls for both careful use of data, and a writing approach able to handle both primary material and critical analysis.

Methodological work on sensitive topics ... is often fragmented because researchers are usually unaware of the ways their colleagues in different substantive areas, different disciplines, or different parts of the world are addressing specific methodological difficulties (Renzetti & Lee 1993, ix).

This is particularly so in the case of NRM research, an arena constantly crossed by many traditions and expressions of belief, globally connected, and yet infinitely variable. At the same time what research treats as content or data, simultaneously exists as ‘belief’ or ethical code to the NRM adherents at the core of my study.

As this research project is reflective and textual, rather than based purely on ‘field research’ in conjunction with a still-functioning NRM, it may prove possible to avoid many of the sensitive issues involved. However, evolving alongside this research is a consciousness that such studies may well be seen as sensitive to those embroiled in ‘the ongoing stigma contest between cult and anticult’ (Ayella 1993, p. 121).

What then will be the approach taken to data collection and analysis in this study? There are many ways to research a NRM. The methodologies used here are selected to help balance historical (outsider) and personal (insider) perspectives available in a study conducted by one of the founders of the NRM under investigation – and to the

additional resources available through the use of a data archive I have held for over thirty five years, and which has not yet been interrogated.

Such data raise an additional methodological issue: the degree to which my own involvement in the UBI experience predisposes my analysis or interpretation towards certain ‘preferred’ perspectives. Researchers, at least until recently, have rarely been genuine research participants. Whether journalists writing a story, or academics doing research, investigators have been *ipso-facto* ‘outsiders’, unable to experientially understand either the objects/subjects of their scrutiny (in this case the Universal Brotherhood of the 1970s and ’80s). By necessity, only a participant-centred form of qualitative research can meet my own participation-experiences at the core of this topic. My desire to represent and critique from both the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ will mean locating approaches which can maximise use of autobiographical and subjective experiences, but also critical techniques to help analyse the records obtained.

## **A Participative Inquiry Approach**

In any qualitative research, the relationship between the participant and the researcher is central to the research itself. In this case the relationship between the researchers *of* and the participants *in* NRMs (particularly the leaders) is likely to be one of mutual suspicion. The ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ dynamic tends to make for a fraught relationship, even with the initial goodwill which characterises the permission phase of the research. Earlier research undertaken on the UBI Community by Patricia Black (1984) confronted some of the same dilemmas, as will be shown in the Literature Review which follows, where Black’s findings are briefly summarised and her *modus operandi* depicted.

As the beliefs, faith, political views, spiritual aims, material goals and self-representations of participants are at the core of qualitative research, the participatory ethos of John Heron’s ‘cooperative inquiry’ (1971) is useful. Cooperative inquiry is also known as *collaborative inquiry* and was first proposed by Heron, in a paper entitled ‘Experience and Method: An Inquiry into the Concept of Experiential Research’ (1971). Heron’s student Peter Reason spent much of his working life expanding Heron’s work. In *Human Inquiry* (1990), Reason depicts Heron’s basic argument that the ‘self-directing ability’ of the human self is compromised by research styles using

questionnaires, observation, and surveys: limiting forms of sampling of an otherwise complex and irreducible human experience. Too much contemporary research, Reason argues,

... aims quite systematically and intentionally to exclude the subjects from all choice about the subject matter of the research, all consideration of appropriate inquiry method, all the creative thinking that goes into making sense; and it therefore excludes from the field of research just that aspect of being – self-determination – which particularly characterises the subjects as persons (Reason 1990, p.4).

Heron saw such methodologies as epistemologically unsound, contributing to an impoverishment of the world, and the treating of people as things to be manipulated and exploited. His response to the problem was to suggest a research model to overcome the reductive data of many dominant methodologies:

... whereas orthodox researchers presuppose that they are self-directed while requiring their subjects to be other-directed, it is possible to conceive of another approach in which *all* those involved are self-directed, contributing both to the creative thinking and to the research action (Reason 1990, p. 4).

Doing research *with* rather than *on* people was the paradigm shift brought into play. Cooperative Inquiry, Participative Inquiry, or ‘Action Research’ as it is alternatively called is a

... family of practices of living inquiry that aims, in a great variety of ways, to link practice and ideas in the service of human flourishing. It is not so much a *methodology* as an *orientation to inquiry* that seeks to create participatory communities of inquiry in which qualities of engagement, curiosity and question posing are brought to bear on significant practical issues (Reason & Bradbury 2008, p. 1).

In this case the research is designed to engage a range of NRM members and ex-members (and other stakeholders) in an inquiry into the contributions of NRMs to society as a whole. Its findings however are projected not only to arise from, but return insights to, NRM movements of all types, opening out the field to new forms of analysis, able to both critique aspects of NRM formation and practice, and to examine how far, as their adherents hope, they may prove to contribute positive social benefits to their broader social community.

Action Research challenges much received wisdom in both academia and among social change and development practitioners, not least because it is a practice of participation,



engaging those who might otherwise be merely subjects of research, or recipients of research-based policies of intervention. Instead Action Research offers informants a role as inquiring co-researchers (see for instance the *insider* (con)textual contributions in Daschke & Ashcraft's *New Religious Movements: A Documentary Reader*, 2005). Action research does not start from a desire to change others 'out there', although it may eventually have that result. Rather it starts from an orientation towards achieving change *with* others (Reason & Bradbury 2008, p. 1) – very much the central program of the UBI, as of many, if not most, of its NRM predecessor and successor institutions. In evolving a research method to suit such aims the perspectives of families, mentors, leaders, participants, originating texts and the media of the time will all be brought together, through a distinctive form of interdisciplinary participative inquiry.

### **Braided Lives and Times**

In particular, the intertwining of the central 'protagonist' lives researched here (and to some extent those of all the 'cast') reveal how the formative ideas and influences of the founders were 'braided' into a set of communally-held beliefs and associated practices. Marge Piercy's novel, *Braided Lives* (1982) famously employs parallel voices as a structural narrative device. I use the 'braided lives' concept here to indicate the combination of cultural paradigms and ideas which formed the later Universal Brotherhood 'plait': its actual practices. The bio-histories (including my own) are also braided, in that I weave my parallel analysis and experiential commentary into the narrative, flashing-forward to braid the protagonists' past with their futures: thus linking their *formative lives* to their Universal Brotherhood *functional roles*. Such braiding, in this case, sees individual influences stamped onto the organisation that evolved through their agency.

Such a study may say as much, if not more, about this New Religious Movement than would a chronological compilation of the historical facts of the group's formal establishment, or an outline of its initiatives and activities, consciously stated aims, purposes and goals, and the personnel who came after the schema was mostly set. By highlighting the biographical influences of the founders, and becoming aware of the way their enthusiasms were themselves shot through with the projects of earlier NRMs, I have been able to focus on the genesis of this group as an *alternative society* (a term

used by the Robinsons to describe the initiative); or a *countercultural New Age Back-to-the-land Spiritual Community* (its 1970s descriptor); as well as a new religious movement that became an organised and incorporated organisation.

In exploring these lives in combination, the study examines the pre-history of the UBI as NRM in ways that could not be contemplated otherwise. Reflective observations accompany the biographical study, integrating issues related to the development of the movement as it coalesced into an organisation: first around the charismatic Fred Robinson's oratory, and then around the organised activities of the politically-savvy Mary Broun-Robinson. The experiences producing their earliest baby-boomer generation *alignee*: me, help position the UBI in the youth-oriented New Age culture of the 1970s. This phase of development updates much earlier NRM beliefs and practices, and so enables analysis of how, and why, the Robinsons continued to attract other alignees to the movement.

The integration of biographic and ethnographic observational elements, with reflective commentary to critique/outline present positions, creates a purpose-built methodological model. Together, the Chapters seek to reveal how a generation which Fred Robinson believed was waiting to embrace New Age *Aquarian* thinking, did in fact experiment with alternative 'spiritual' forms of communal living, and experience an organic and simplified back-to-the-land sustainable life-style – at least for a time.

This drive towards a multi-faceted yet ultimately integrated approach does however raise issues in relation to the individual integrity of the biographical foci. How far within an NRM does individual identity cohere to collective ideals – and how can a narrative and analytical methodology capture, and reflect upon this? Part of the answer may lie in postmodern notions of social and cultural identity.

## **Hybridity**

Identity theory under late modernity emphasises the existence of mixed and optional or elective formations within the formation of self. *Hybridity* refers in its most basic sense to a mixture of influences. Here the term is employed to describe the eclectic mixing of beliefs and positions that coalesced over time to create the schema and culture of the

UBI Community, set in motion via the Robinsons' own hybridisation of a range of sources, and subsequently impacting upon the many 'selves' who joined the movement. Not unlike the many transcultural mixtures of global culture, the Robinsons' legacy mixed religious, spiritual and practical parent ideologies. Applying Paul Gilroy's thinking about racial/cultural hybridity to the Robinsons' mixing of ideas across a very broad NRM spectrum, it can be seen that here too a 'recombinant form is indebted to its "parent" cultures' but remained 'assertively and insubordinately a bastard' (Gilroy 2004, p. 117). More than the sum of its cultural antecedents, this movement, it will be argued, produced its own distinctively Australian blend of beliefs and practices.

The *Robinsonian* schema was further subjectively hybridised by my own generation's radical revisionist cultural positioning. In each case 'the mix' is powerfully characterised, it will be argued, in the lives of the inter-actants of the UBI founder/leaders – but also, it will be suggested, in the ceaseless blending of philosophical, religious and socio-political ideas, Community practices and discursive modalities, driving the written record. The primary *Shalam Light* texts used to disseminate New Age 'understandings' for instance, as the study will show, include in the texts themselves, a mixed-mode reworking which mimics the many transformations of self, evidenced in all three of the UBI founder narratives recorded here. The concept of hybridity can thus be seen here in *action*, via the life experiences and texts of the protagonists, as well as in the writing – which hybridises biography, autobiography, auto-ethnography, history, cultural analysis and elements of creative non-fiction.

### **Bricolage and *Multivoicedness***

The diverse nature of this research, which relies on fragments of memory; both mine and that of other people; as well as incomplete extant texts from incomplete archives; means that the data produce a patch-worked account of the past. To this extent the research can be seen as an exercise in *bricolage*, a term used in several disciplines, including literary criticism, to refer to the construction or creation of an artefact from a diverse range of elements that happen to be available. Jacques Derrida recalls Claude Lévi-Strauss's early use of this term in *The Savage Mind* (1962, English translation 1966):

... he presents as what he calls *bricolage* what might be called the discourse of this method. The *bricoleur*, says Levi-Strauss, is someone who uses ‘the means at hand,’ that is, the instruments he finds at his disposition around him, those which are already there, which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt them... (Derrida 1993, p. 231).

Lévi Strauss suggested the appropriation of pre-existing data – ‘the means at hand’ (1974, pp. 16-33, 35-6, 150n) to meet contemporary problems in much the same way as Fred Robinson appropriated *truths* (his ideals and theories) and what to do about them (his rhetorical encapsulations and his actions) in the construction of his *modern revealed knowledge* (teachings and writings) and *Alternative Society* (Shalam-Carranya and the later UBI). The Robinsonian criterion for the appropriateness of any proposition/position was always, ‘Does it meet the needs of the moment?’ From the 1930s onwards, Fred Robinson began creating his schemata by way of a process of bricolage; in partnership with Mary Broun-Robinson in the 1960s their New Age Information Centre significantly advanced the project and the process; in the 1970s and into the ’80 the bricolage-building continued with the baby-boomer cohort who joined them.

It is interesting to note that Lévi-Strauss suggested that ‘mythical thought’ itself was ‘a kind of bricolage’ (1974, p. 17), suggesting that ‘it builds ideological castles out of the debris of what was once social discourse’ (ibid.). Writing this thesis is certainly an exercise in bricolage – one that inevitably transforms the Robinsons’ story. I recognise that it is impossible to write their story without changing *what really happened* into *what I have edited*: transformed and constructed through the process of bricolage:

... the practice of bricolage can be seen as operating through several key transformations: addition, deletion, substitution and transposition (Nöth 1990, p. 341).

Here the exercise in bricolage is not just focussed on the piecing together of the Robinsonian primary sources; it includes the way I have employed and emplotted secondary sources side by side with primary sources (often in the footnotes) as I comment on the Robinsons, their sources of information, the functioning of the UBI, and even extrapolate data and arrange findings to make observations on new religious movements in general – in new ways. Such arrangement of the ‘means at hand’ allows me, as *past-participant* and *present-observer* to ‘meet the needs of *the research*

*moment* – thus making me a bricoleur too. Being conscious of this inevitable process, the research is bound – by way of *the human state* of a bricoleur – to be flawed. While I recognise it is impossible to fairly reconstruct the history of the Robinsons and the UBI, it is important to present what could be found to contextualise their lives: their thoughts, their feelings and their actions.

The study then is a pastiche which uncovers aspects of the central protagonists’ lives, and of their living artefact the Universal Brotherhood, in ways that might not be achieved through consistent narrative form or style or timeline. It reverses for instance into the 1800s to examine the life of one of Fred Robinson’s literary mentors; and then fast forwards to an anecdote relating to early 1980s experiences in the UBI Community. The technique allows for a wide spectrum of *Bakhtinian* dialogic ‘multivoicedness’ to be experienced through the text itself:

Our dialogues are therefore not only backward looking (whose words we are using and reacting to) but also forward looking (to future responses that we expect or desire). Bakhtin’s especial interest in the novel arose because it was there that he reckoned writers were most free to experiment with the ‘multivoicedness’ (heteroglossia) of human society (Pope 2002, p. 235).

As Bakhtin’s technical vocabulary presents certain difficulties, I have included the definition of ‘heteroglossia’ produced in the Glossary of *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1981) and written by its editorial team:

**Heteroglossia:** The base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance. It is that which insures the primacy of context over text. At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions – social, historical, meteorological, physiological – that will insure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions; all utterances are heteroglot in that they are functions of a matrix of forces practically impossible to recoup, and therefore impossible to resolve. Heteroglossia is as close a conceptualisation as is possible of that locus where centripetal and centrifugal forces collide; as such, it is that which a systematic linguistics must always suppress (Holquist [General Editor], p. 428).

The textual innovations at times employed within the academic framework of this study are thus presented as part of a new moment of qualitative research: one which seeks to find multiple ways of presenting *multivoiced* data.

## The Seventh Moment of Qualitative Research

The concept of ‘historical moments’ of qualitative research, developed by Norman Denzin and Yvonne Lincoln (2000, p. 3; pp. 12–17; pp. 1047–1063) explains how methodologies have been developed to meet the changes indicated within both cultural context and research-based paradigms. The ‘Sixth Moment’, representing an era of format and representational experimentation, is seen to include creative nonfiction, autobiographical ethnography, poetic representations and multimedia presentations. ‘The seventh moment is concerned with moral discourse, with the development of sacred textualities’ (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, p. 3). This *Seventh Moment* of qualitative research ‘asks that the social sciences and humanities become sites for critical conversation about democracy, race, gender, class, nation-states, globalisation, freedom, and community’ (ibid.).

So how does this relate to the current project? This study will argue and set out to show that NRM Communities are in effect *microcosmic States* with their own canon laws and structures. They aim to set up alternative societies (as the Robinsons depicted the UBI) in which moral discourse and sacred textualities are a primary labour. Issues of democracy, gender, freedom and community are central to NRMs such as the Universal Brotherhood. Research focussed on the evolution of one small group can thus assist in understanding NRMs as part of, rather than apart from, the rest of society. This inclusive stance sees the formation of NRMs as a form of response to societal pressures, rather than as attempts to escape or subvert society. This position is implicit in the aphorism used by both the UBI Community and the Findhorn Community: ‘The highest form of protest is to build the new’. The issue is less one of locating this radicalism within the Community, however, than of finding the critical and analytical tools to encompass that radicalism.

How then has scholarship evolved, in relation to its approaches to research into such phenomena as NRMs? One way forward is to consider what this study is *not*. The ethnographic critiquing of the Universal Brotherhood as undertaken by Black in the early 1980s: *The Fashioning of the Earth Anew: An Ethnography of the Universal Brotherhood, a Religious Utopian Commune* (1984) can now be seen as part of what Berry calls ‘the Old Story’ (cited in Denzin & Lincoln 2000, p.1061). It undertakes an

outsider account, based on observation and interview, and attempting a structured characterisation of the values, and figures, of the community pursued. In Black's account, I am for instance represented as 'The Preacher' for the UBI: its central manager and instructor; an *essentialising* depiction, directed more to structuring Black's vision of the Community, than to capturing the complex experience of lived realities.

This new study instead argues that the New Age grand narrative of the Robinsons, and the NRM Community the Universal Brotherhood which they inaugurated, are ripe for a new cultural critique: one that draws on a "post" post period' (post-poststructuralism, post-postmodernism) and can be seen as a period of reconstruction (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, p.1061). What is sought in such a study is a form able to produce a re-integration of the analytical researcher, into a more participatory and collaborative form of applied social research:

We face a choice, in the seventh moment, of declaring ourselves committed to detachment or in solidarity with the human community. We come to know, and we come to exist meaningfully, only in community. We have the opportunity to rejoin that community as its resident intellectuals and change agents (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, p. 1061).

The proposal is especially pertinent in the case of research into NRMs, which have, like the Universal Brotherhood itself, been seen as marginal social experiments. While the movements themselves have frequently taken up such a stance, seeking to promote 'alternative' social values, they have also done so from centrally communal values: practical experiments in living. The debates that ensue – often strongly contesting – have subsequently contributed much to mainstream ideas of community. The presence of self-consciously innovative communal living has challenged more conventional principles – and along with them, the world views that operate in their support.

To summarise: academe has encouraged interdisciplinary research and hybridised concepts, seeking a 'space-between' (Dawson 2002) in a new moment of research. What were once marginal research styles are being reassessed in the seventh moment of qualitative research: 'The whole concept of centre and margins is being transfigured by methods, methodologies, research practices, and epistemologies scarcely dreamed of a generation ago – or even when the first edition of this *Handbook* was published' (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, p. 1063).

Mirroring the marginal life styles of the co-founders of the UBI with an eclectic and hybrid mix of methodologies and techniques of representation suits both the content, and the moment. How then should the source material of what is at core an ethnographic history be selected and represented? What source materials are available – and how should these be analysed and arranged?



## Chapter 3: Literature Review

While a broader range of ‘insider’ (primary) literature in the various fields that informed the UBI is surveyed within the Chapters of this Thesis, an introduction to the scope of the primary sources – in particular the Robinsons’ main texts of influence – is necessary. These informative texts fall into categories which include Religious Texts, Spiritual Science and New Age Texts, UFO Texts, Political Texts, Lifestyle Texts, and Novels – many of them still circulating actively within, and between, NRMs across the world, and colouring much of the subsequent formation of new manifestos and programs.

To help analyse and explain the content of this ‘insider’ literature and how it developed, a literature review of the major fields of ‘outsider’ (secondary) academic research is necessary. Without attempting a definitive list of titles, works have been selected which assist in depicting and placing the Universal Brotherhood within both an Australian and a global context. Research fields include Back-to-the-land Intentional Communities, the New Age as an international phenomenon, and New Religious Movements. Each strand feeds into an integrated analysis of how the Universal Brotherhood’s particular perspectives evolved – but it also works to illustrate the processing and re-processing of ideas, as they are taken up and re-organised by distinctive NRMs.

### Insider Literature

Various streams of primary source literature can be pieced together from the Robinsons’ reading and research, prior to 1971, when their teachings were presented to my generation as a *synthesis of truth* – a revelation for the New Age. Fred Robinson referred to his schema (an internal representation of the world) as ‘Modern Revealed Knowledge’, ‘The Cosmic Viewpoint’ or ‘Spiritual Science’ – or perhaps most simply as ‘The Truth: how things really are’. He and Mary believed it to be their ‘service’ or ‘Work’ to *essentialise* the most relevant and important teachings about the (thought to be the imminent) ‘New Age’. Fred and Mary saw themselves as *collators of truths* rather than *originators of truth*. The Robinsonian Schema was made up of information and understandings gained via the literature they read, the organisations they had been involved in, and the life experiences which shaped them – including personal spiritual

experiences and original mixing and matching of ideas: hybridisation. The sources of this Robinsonian Schema were sometimes unattributed. Both Fred and Mary Robinson saw ‘the truth’ as owned by everyone who sought it. They *absorbed the truth* from anywhere and everywhere, to incorporate it into their own distinctive overarching plan.

Reviewing or even mentioning all the texts which influenced the UBI will not be possible. The study will trace many sources, introducing other influential authors and texts as part of the story of the UBI founders, but the most influential are mentioned here, in order to establish the eclecticism of the moment. While texts read by early members of the UBI were also to influence the 1970s–’80s Community, it is the seminal texts of the Robinsons’ own schema which most shaped it. These are however, as this study argues, themselves composites of a complex mesh of existing ideas – indeed it would be entirely possible to create the story of the Universal Brotherhood from an exploration of the texts which informed it. While the lives of the founders drive this research, the texts also tell the story. The titles alone are often enough to encapsulate the content and the ethos of the work – but what counts is the inter-relationships that emerge, and the selectivity that can be exposed. The Robinsons’ and the UBI selection thus encodes the values they and their alignees were seen to espouse.

While all the texts mentioned in this insider section of the Literature Review are referenced in the Reference Section, I have included full detailed references of the major sources within the text, where it seems useful to provide full names, early publication history, publisher and place of publication – factors relevant to telling the stories of the texts themselves.

## **Traditional Religious Texts**

As with many Western communal movements, the *King James Bible* was among the most influential of the Robinsons’ texts. The social and moral framework of the Community stemmed from the Bible. Fred and Mary often quoted the Bible, always as an authority. However, even the Bible was quoted selectively, always in support of their own schema, which included from the outset the idea that *Modern Revealed Knowledge* superseded the Bible’s allegorical stories:

*Jesus couldn't tell his disciples about the atom. They couldn't understand or receive such things; so he taught in parables. Daniel from the Old Testament said: 'Close up the book and seal up the Word until the time of the end when Knowledge shall be increased.'<sup>14</sup> Well it is now the time of the end, and knowledge has been increased. It is now available to all who seek and ask (Fred Robinson, lectures 1970s).*

New Age Modern Revealed Knowledge was seen to fulfil and expand the *essence of truth* held to be given in the ancient texts of all religions. While Fred (mis)quoted and loosely paraphrased the Bible – always in the King James style – Mary was more taken with J.B. Phillips' translations, particularly *The New Testament in Modern English* (1958). Phillips texts came into Mary Broun's life during a period when she was fully immersed in religious seeking. Mary was to read all Phillips' New Testament translations as they were published from the late 1940s.<sup>15</sup>

Some of the dates Fred prophesied, well before the 1970s, were derived from Biblically inspired prophecy. The most influential of these was David Davidson's and Herbert Aldersmith's *The Great Pyramid: Its Divine Message* (1924, Williams and Norgate, London).<sup>16</sup> This giant work, so Fred told his audiences of the 1970s, '*was the most important book on Pyramid Prophecy ever produced: it predicted the Great Depression to the day*'. Fred no longer had a copy when I knew him, but having been a deep student of it, he had created a diagram, which summarised Davidson's 'findings',

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<sup>14</sup> 'But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, [even] to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased' (Daniel 12.4, KJV). Interestingly, 'the running to and fro' was deleted in Fred's paraphrasing.

<sup>15</sup> *The Phillips New Testament in Modern English* (1958, The Macmillan Company, London) is an English translation of the New Testament Bible translated by Anglican clergyman J.B. Phillips ... Phillips began by rewording the New Testament epistles for his church's youth group in modern English ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phillips\\_New\\_Testament\\_in\\_Modern\\_English](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phillips_New_Testament_in_Modern_English), accessed 1.6.2011). Phillips himself talked of the revelation he made as he translated the New Testament, describing it as 'extraordinarily alive' and unlike any experience he had had with non-scriptural ancient texts. He referred to the scriptures as speaking to his condition in an 'uncanny way', similar to the way the author of Psalm 119 talks ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Bertram\\_Phillips](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Bertram_Phillips), accessed 16.2.2010). Mary told me that Phillips' translation 'had made the Bible "come alive" for me in an intellectually inexplicable way' (pers. com., 1972).

<sup>16</sup> David Davidson (1884–1956) was a qualified structural engineer. An initial agnostic and sceptic of the Bible, in his earlier years Davidson set out to disprove claims that the internal passages of the Great Pyramid of Giza formed a chronological map of prophecies. He spent twenty-five years analysing the Great Pyramid with Dr. Herbert Aldersmith (1847–1918). They wrote *The Great Pyramid: Its Divine Message* (1924) (see the following for more: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David\\_Davidson\\_\(engineer\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Davidson_(engineer)); [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert\\_Aldersmith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert_Aldersmith), accessed 27.7.2011).

and was included as one of the half-dozen *Charts* (as he called them) – Fred’s main audiovisual teaching aids.

Added to prophetic texts were those which prescribed the tenets of a communal, but socially sequestered, spiritual life. A key text for the Robinsons and the UBI was a slim classic of Christian monastic life. *The Practice of the Presence of God* is a compilation of four ‘conversations’ and fifteen letters from a seventeenth-century French Carmelite monk. Compiled by Father Joseph de Beaufort, it records the wisdom and teachings of Brother Lawrence (born Nicholas Herman of Lorraine, c. 1614–1691). The copy the Robinsons had was a 1904 edition published by James Nisbet and Company, London. A constant theme in the text is the development of an awareness of the presence of God, even when doing the most menial of tasks, such as peeling vegetables or sweeping leaves. This text thus gave spiritual status to any task. Fred Robinson referred to this practice as *constant contact* – the most desirable state of intense but relaxed awareness. Exactly how or when Fred or Mary first read this book is unknown; that it came to be a pivotal sacred text in relation to being *in the consciousnesses* is undoubted. Fred Robinson often spoke about this book when extolling the simple life of *loving God and one another*, while engaged in *the practical pioneering work that needed to be done* – being of service. He believed that if a person was in constant contact with God, *doing what they were meant to be doing*, then God would look after their spiritual development. Meditation and self-conscious self-development were seen to be unnecessary if one was following programs such as Brother Lawrence’s practice of the presence of God.

Many other overtly Christian communicators were secondary influences on one or other of the Robinsons, among them C.S. Lewis (1898–1963), the lay theologian, Christian apologist and children’s novelist. While Mary personally enjoyed and politically recommended all Lewis’ children’s books to UBI parents during the 1970s and ’80s, it was her reading of Lewis’ Christian apologetics that conferred upon her a particular attitude towards the devil or ‘Old Nick’ as she often called him. Her stance about the

way the devil worked is perhaps best understood through reading her favourite text on the subject: C.S. Lewis' book, *The Screwtape Letters*.<sup>17</sup>

Mary Broun was also influenced by a number of popular Christian 'metaphysical' 'positive thinking' authors. Florence Scovel Shinn (1871–1940), an American artist and book illustrator who became a spiritual teacher and metaphysical writer in her middle years focuses on the power of positive thinking and the need to project love, usually through affirmations, Shinn' self-published *The Game of Life and How to Play it* (1925),<sup>18</sup> was the most influential of her works. Mary was to copy the style of this title for the only text which can be regarded as her book: *The Laws of Life and How to Live Them* (1964). Another, and more popular American preacher and writer, Dr. Norman Vincent Peal (1898–1993), who wrote *The Power of Positive Thinking*,<sup>19</sup> was to have an impact on Mary just prior to her involvement with New Age texts and groups.

Frank Buchman, the controversial founder of the Oxford Group, which subsequently became Moral ReArmament (MRA), and is today known as Initiatives of Change, was a social reformer/leader and author who influenced Mary Broun prior to meeting Fred Robinson. Especially influential was a hagiography about Frank Buchman (1878–1961) by Peter Howard: *Frank Buchman's Secret* (1961).<sup>20</sup> Both the story and the 'secret' of

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<sup>17</sup> C.S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*, first published in 1942 by Geoffrey Bles, London, is a satirical Christian apologetics novel written in epistolary style. The story takes the form of a series of letters from a senior demon, Screwtape, to his nephew, a junior 'tempter' named Wormwood, so as to advise him on methods of securing the damnation of a British man, known only as 'the Patient' ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Screwtape\\_Letters](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Screwtape_Letters), accessed 27.7.2011).

<sup>18</sup> Shinn is considered part of the New Thought movement, as her writings follow in the tradition of Phineas Quimby (1802–1866), Emma Curtis Hopkins (1849–1925), and both Charles Fillmore (1854–1948) and Myrtle Fillmore (1845–1931), co-founders of the Unity Church. New Age motivational author Louise Hay acknowledges her as an early influence ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florence\\_Scovel\\_Shinn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florence_Scovel_Shinn), accessed 27.7.2011).

<sup>19</sup> First published in 1952 by Fawcett Crest, New York, *The Power of Positive Thinking* is Peal's most widely read work, staying on the New York Times best-seller-list for 186 consecutive weeks. One of the major criticisms of *The Power of Positive Thinking* is that it is full of anecdotes that are hard to substantiate ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman\\_Vincent\\_Peale](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman_Vincent_Peale), accessed 27.7.2011).

<sup>20</sup> Peter D. Howard (1908–1965) was a British journalist and playwright. Howard met, interviewed, and fell in with Buchman, eventually leaving the *Daily Express* and joining the inner circle of what became known as the MRA movement. In 1961 *Frank Buchman's Secret* was published by Heinemann, London, and Doubleday New York. With Buchman's death Howard took his place as the chosen successor to leadership of the worldwide MRA movement ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter\\_Howard\\_\(journalist\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Howard_(journalist)), accessed 27.7.2011). In 1932 and again in 1933 he sought, unsuccessfully, to meet with Adolf Hitler, whom he hoped to convert. Buchman's willingness to work with people of different religions without

Buchman were to have an impact Mary Broun, especially his rigorous self-reflection techniques, and his energy for the reinvigoration of moral principles both personally and politically, and the value he placed on silence. Elements of the Universal Brotherhood's tenets can be traced to Buchman's teachings, in particular the four moral standards of absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness, and absolute love – which while recognised as impossible to attain, were guidelines to help determine whether a course of action was directed by God. Mary conscientiously followed this demanding method of assessing a course of action all her life.

Also of influence was Catherine Marshall (1914–1983), who began her writing career with an inspirational biography of her late husband: *A Man Called Peter* (1951).<sup>21</sup> Dr. Peter Marshall (1902 – 1949) was a Scottish-American preacher who served twice as the Chaplain of the US Senate. Marshall was a living demonstration to Mary Broun of religiously inspired wholesome manhood – a person who was spiritual and yet engaged with the social and political issues of his time. The influence of the biographies about such people as Buchman and Marshall was likely to have saved Mary Broun from becoming too drawn into Fred Robinson's more isolated spiritual positions and prophecies, which adhered narrowly and adamantly to conspiracy theories outside of – and in opposition to – the more traditional Christian world view, to which Mary (in part at least) always felt a connection. Robinsonian thought – and practice, as we shall see – integrated and transmitted forward to new generations a very broad range of religious and spiritual texts – not all of them rigorously Christian in their orientation.

### **'Spiritually Scientific' or 'New Age' Texts**

Levi M. Arnold's Spiritualist text, *The History and Origin of All Things* was published in 1852 in Poughkeepsie, New York, the acknowledged home of Spiritualism. It was published for wider circulation in 1883 by Colby and Rich in Boston, and revised and

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demand that they convert to Christianity was often a source of confusion and conflict with other Christians. He had several meetings over the years with Mohandas Gandhi, whom he greatly respected ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank N. D. Buchman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_N._D._Buchman), accessed 27.7.201).

<sup>21</sup> When Peter Marshall died of a heart attack at the age 47, as a response to the public affection for her husband's memory, and to create a means of supporting herself and their young son, Catherine Marshall wrote her husband's life story as she saw it. *A Man Called Peter* was first published by McGraw Hill Book Co., New York; its nationwide success induced her to continue writing. The book was made into a motion picture in 1955. Marshall authored or edited of over 30 books, which have sold over 16 million copies ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine Marshall](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine_Marshall), accessed 17.7.2011).

republished ‘through HIM’ by Anna A. McDonald in 1936 – the version Fred read. It has recently been edited by Robert T. Newcomb and was published by Kessinger in 2007. This two volume work was rarely mentioned by Fred Robinson in the 1970s, but is proven in this study to be foundational for him.<sup>22</sup> This text put in place his overarching world view, and his stance of serving mankind by doing ‘God’s Will’. Arnold purportedly began the writing for this book on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 1848, the date Fred referred to as the start of the start of the ‘New Age’, and referred to in *Oahspe* as the start of ‘the Kosmon Era’; identifying it directly with the acknowledged beginning of Modern Spiritualism: the Fox Sisters and the ‘Hydesville Rappings’.<sup>23</sup>

The title page of the 1883 edition reveals the extraordinary nature of these kinds of texts (it is thought to be an exact copy of the first publication in 1852):

The History Of The Origin Of All Things  
Including  
**The History of Man**  
From his creation to his finality, but not to his end  
Written by God’s Holy Spirit, through an Earthly Medium  
L.M. ARNOLD of POUGHKEEPSIE, N.Y.  
Published by the direction of the spirits,  
and, in God’s will,  
submitted to a holy and searching criticism  
from every earnest seeker after truth.  
For sale by all booksellers, who desire to forward the work of  
God’s Redemption of Man  
From ignorance, fear, and torturing doubt  
A M E N  
Written in 1852

A reading of this ‘revelation’ reveals that Fred Robinson subsequently absorbed and took on something of the book’s rhetoric. The *pathos* involved in being a poor, humble,

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<sup>22</sup> Mary Broun-Robinson met Watson M. Connor, the then last publisher of *The History Of The Origin Of All Things*, when she was in San Francisco during her investigation of New Age movements in 1964. Her account, in Chapter 8, ‘Linking up in San Francisco’, acknowledges Fred’s long time correspondence with this book’s US publisher. An edited version of this text can be viewed at the following site: <http://www.thehistoryofallthings.com/PDFFiles/The%20History%20of%20the%20Origin%20of%20All%20Things.pdf>, accessed 20.7.2011.

<sup>23</sup> The Fox sisters were three sisters from New York who played an important role in the creation of Spiritualism. The three sisters were Leah Fox (1814–1890), Margaret Fox (1833–1893) and Kate Fox (1837–1892). The two younger sisters used “rappings” to convince their much older sister and others that they were communicating with spirits. Their older sister then took charge of them and managed their careers for some time. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fox\\_sisters](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fox_sisters), accessed 7.7.2011).

willing sincere seeker, yet a genuine prophet of ‘God’s truth’, is exactly how Fred saw himself:

Having at sundry times clearly shadowed forth the nature of the future, it now pleases Him to declare it plainly, through an humble seeker of happiness who is willing to be taught and who only desires to receive the truth ... This will be a joyful time for all who will see it; and verily, I say, that *there be those standing now in the body who, in the body, shall see it* [italics mine]. Blessed be God that He has chosen the poor of this world and the humble among men for the accomplishment of his ends... (Arnold 1883, Foreword).

Fred was convinced, maybe even by the italicised text above, that he also would see *the end of the old age of ignorance and deception*, and be present at *the dawn of the New Age of Aquarius*. Another associated and influential book on Spiritualism, again written in Arnold’s home town Poughkeepsie (still a centre for Spiritualism), also influenced Fred; I remember him referring to a book of *Divine Revelations*, most likely to have been the work of American Andrew Jackson Davis (1826–1910).

Davis was a leading thinker of the American Spiritualist Movement, and an enthusiastic supporter of idealistic social reforms. His 800 page compendium of the occult and the paranormal is titled *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and a Voice to Mankind* and was published in 1847 by Banner Publishing, Boston; it ran to thirty four editions in thirty years. Davis thus became famous in his time and influential within a network of spiritually minded thinkers:

Edgar Allan Poe sometimes attended Davis’ séances with Dr. Lyon and the Rev. Fishbough, as did the Fourierist (utopian socialist) social reformer Albert Brisbane (1809–1890), a co-founder of Brook Farm, and another utopian dreamer, the ex-Universalist minister, Swedenborgian mystic, and religious communal settlement organizer Thomas Lake Harris (1823–1906) (Park 2002).

Swedenborg’s writings, a precursor to modern Spiritualism, are seen to have been blended with Charles Fourier’s theories about reincarnation (Park 2002). Fourier was a utopian socialist whose influence on later communitarian movements and social reform in the United States was significant. He advocated a reconstruction of society based on communal associations of producers known as phalanges (phalanxes), a cooperative agricultural community bearing responsibility for the social welfare of the individual, characterized by continual shifting of roles among its members. He felt that phalanges would distribute wealth more equitably than under capitalism and that they could be



introduced into any political system, including a monarchy. The individual member of a phalange was to be rewarded on the basis of the total productivity of the phalange (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/215092/Charles-Fourier>, accessed 24.3.2011). Fourier inspired the founding of the communist community called La Reunion near present-day Dallas, Texas, as well as several other communities within the USA ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles\\_Fourier](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Fourier), accessed 23.3.2011).

Such spiritual and practical impulses flowed through to Fred Robinson via the early Spiritualists' writings, and can be seen to have influenced him to join and then found spiritually informed agrarian communities. Swedenborg and Fourier thus represent voices predating and informing the spiritual and communitarian voices Fred Robinson heard and followed. Fred was well-informed about Swedenborg as pioneer of Spiritualism. I remember him talking at length about him to a more mature Seeker in the 1970s. While what Fred knew about Fourier's colonies is unknown, it is clear that this thinking leaked through to Fred via such writers as Andrew Jackson Davis.

Once again in these works March 31<sup>st</sup> 1848 is mentioned; the day on which the 'Hydesville Rappings' occurred; and the date which signaled the birth of a New Era, or as Fred told his 1971 audiences, the start of the preparatory phase to the Aquarian New Age. The 'Hydesville Rappings' were big news in America at the time, publicised as a signal that communication between the living and the dead was not only possible, but being demonstrated. It is believed by 'scientific Spiritualists' that

on the memorable evening of March 31, 1848, he [Davis] wrote in his diary that he heard a 'tender and strong' voice tell him, 'Brother, the good work has begun, behold a living demonstration is born'. That exact same night the Fox sisters established their first communication and the era of scientific Spiritualism began (Batten 2010, <http://www.insearchofspirit.com/Spiritualism.html>, accessed 22. 3. 2011).

It is not surprising that 'The Poughkeepsie Seer' or simply 'Jackson' (as he became known within Spiritualist circles) has also been called the "John the Baptist" of Modern Spiritualism and eventually became known as the Father of Modern Spiritualism (ibid.). He is however a barely remembered influence on the thought/thinking behind mid-to-late twentieth-century NRMs such as the UBI. Many, if not most, of the major strands of alternative spiritual, philosophical and socio-political movements were blended into

the globally-interconnected and *interconceptual* world of the New Age and the NRMs more generally.

Max Heindel's book, *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception: An Elementary Treatise Upon Man's Past Evolution, Present Constitution and Future Development* was published in 1909 by his movement, the Rosicrucian Fellowship, Oceanside, California. Fred saw Heindel as a '*Spiritual Scientist*'. It was this book which was most associated with Fred's conversion to The Rosicrucian Order of the Aquarians (ROTA). Max Heindel's life, key aspects of his teaching, and a brochure from ROTA, the Australian movement financially supported by Heindel's organisation, are examined in Chapter 5 Part 3, while their contribution to Robinsonian thinking is analysed. Their influence meanwhile marks a continuing predisposition within this, and other NRMs, towards amalgamation of a number of different source-texts. For Fred Robinson they illustrate a life-long tendency not simply to read and study, but to act upon and operationalise the life-values promoted in such texts.

John Ballou Newbrough's *Oahspe*:<sup>24</sup> *A Kosmon Bible in the Words of Jehovih and His Angel Ambassadors*, as the 1960 ('Kosmon Press for Kosmon Unity', London), publication titled it, was first self-published in 1883. It was this '*Reference Book*' which most defined Fred Robinson's later life, for he became convinced he should try to actualise 'The Book of Shalam'<sup>25</sup> (1960, pp. 809–830) contained within 'The Book of Jehovih's Kingdom on Earth' (1960, pp. 805–833) – itself contained within *Oahspe*. This book-within-a-book-within-a-book, sets out a *blueprint for how to start a Fraternity/Community* – and it captured Fred Robinson's imagination. As the

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<sup>24</sup> The meaning of the word 'Oahspe' is explained in an online glossary of terms: 'Sky, earth (corpor) and spirit. The all; the sum of corporeal and spiritual knowledge as at present' (<http://www.angelfire.com/in2/oahspe3/glossary.html>, accessed 15.3.2011). Unfortunately there is no reference to where this is explained in either of the two publications (1891 and 1960) available for this research. The website of the New Mexico State University, which houses a 'Shalam Museum' and supports information on the Shalam Colony suggests the above, but adds another dimension: 'Oahspe means "earth", "sky", and "spirit" in the language of the sunken continent of Pan' (<http://archives.nmsu.edu/exhibits/shalam2/shalam2.html>, accessed 24.3.2011).

<sup>25</sup> Under the heading 'Book of Shalam' is the curious capitalised sub-heading 'ALL OF WHICH IS AN ANTI-SCRIPT', which is then end-noted with the following: 'We understand by this term, and also by the book itself, that what is set forth as being in the past, has not yet occurred. In such respect it is a picture of the future, as will be demonstrated in actual practice' (*Oahspe* 1960, p. 833). Fred took on the job of trying to materialise this complex set of promises from somewhere in the early 1950s until he died in 1983.

influences derived from the twenty-one pages of ‘The Book of Shalam’ were to so affect the lives of those who came to experience an alternative lifestyle in the Universal Brotherhood, I intend to explore it in greater depth than other ‘insider texts’. It is important to note that the Robinsons recommended that Seekers read only the last four ‘books’, the others being the ‘Book of Judgement’ (*Oahspe* 1960, pp. 753–793), the ‘Book of Inspiration’ (ibid., pp. 794–804) and the ‘Book of Discipline’ (ibid., pp. 834–844). Most of the rest of the book was considered too cryptic and enigmatic to bother with.

*Oahspe*’s early publication full title, almost certainly following the format and style of Levi M. Arnold’s *History of the Origin of All Things* (its Second Edition also published in 1883) was complex to say the least. As a book title Newbrough certainly outdoes Arnold’s effort; and it has been reproduced in full here rather than in the Reference list, to capture the spirit of such texts. Even though the full page lay-out, and the variations in font-size have been foregone, the effect of this reference is eccentric, to say the least.

*Oahspe: A New Bible in the Words of Jehovih and His Angel Ambassadors. A Sacred History of the Domains of the Higher and Lower Heavens on the Earth for the Past Twenty-four Thousand Years, Being from the Submersion of the Continent of Pan in the Pacific Ocean, Commonly Called The Flood or Deluge, to the Kosmon Era. Also a Brief History of the Preceding Fifty-five Thousand Years, Together with a Synopsis of the Cosmogony of the Universe; the Creation of the Planets; the Creation of Man; the Unseen Worlds; the Labour and Glory of Gods and Goddesses in the Ethereal Heavens; with the New Commandments of Jehovih to Man to the Present Day. With Revelations from the Second-Resurrection, Formed in Words in the Thirty-third Year of the Kosmon Era, 1891: Anno Kosmon 43, Oahspe Publishing Association, Boston and London.*<sup>26</sup>

While the complexities of *Oahspe* were ignored, the chapters mentioned above were taken very seriously by the Robinsons, becoming key teachings for the later UBI. What follows is taken from Chapter I of the ‘Book of Jehovih’s Kingdom on Earth’. As perhaps the most pivotal of Fred Robinson’s *what-needs-doing-now* or ‘*Action Cycle*’ texts, it is included here within this review of *Oahspe*, to give a sense of the voice, and of the themes which ran through Fred’s talks to his baby-boomer audience of the early

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<sup>26</sup> This title page to the 1891 edition is believed to replicate the 1883 first edition in all but the last two lines which reference the date and publication details. Anno Kosmon 43 refers to the years since the start of the ‘Kosmon Era’: 1848.

1970s. Roman numeral chapters with verse numbers characterise this columned text, conferring on it the mystical allure of a Biblical or at least prophetic provenance.

## CHAPTER I

In the early days of the Kosmon era, after the revelation of the Father's kingdom on earth had been published, [Oahspe Bible 1882] and were known abroad over all the world, there went forth many in Jehovih's name, to accomplish unto the resurrection of man, and for the glory of the Almighty, and the new kingdom [of Heaven on Earth].

2. Foremost amongst the many, there came out of Uz [worldly society] one who was esteemed wise and good above all others; and because he was a representative man, the people named him Tae.

3. And Tae prayed unto Jehovih for light and knowledge as to how best he could accomplish good unto the resurrection of the race of man.

4. And Jehovih answered Tae, saying: ***Go, bring My people out of Uz and found them in a place by themselves; for now is the beginning of the founding of My kingdom of Heaven on Earth.***

5. Tae answered, saying: Behold, O Jehovih, I have gathered together many men and women, and they all profess a desire to found Thy kingdom [of Heaven on Earth].

6. One desireth to be a teacher; another, to be a superintendent; another, an overseer; another, an adviser.

7. And they are all learned and wise and good in their own way; but alas, they are neither workers nor capitalists, the two chief of all that I require.

8. Now, I pray Thee, O Father, what shall Thy servant do?

9. Jehovih answered Tae, saying: ***Go, Seek, and bring out of Uz orphan babes and castaway infants and foundlings.***

10. And these shall be thy colony, which shall be My new kingdom on earth.

11. Tae inquired: what can a man do with babes? How shall I feed them? Moreover I have no money to hire nurses.

12. Jehovih said: ***Have faith in Thy Creator; in a good work done unto My little ones, behold, I will provide.***

13. ***Whatever thou dost unto them, even so dost thou unto Me, wherein thou shalt not fail.***

14. ***Neither shalt thou strive to teach any adult man or woman who is without faith in Me. Behold, My people are infants in this era.***

15. ***Deal thou with them, and with such only as are willing to serve them; for as much as they are served, even so am I served also.*** (Oahspe 1960, p. 805)

A present day enthusiast on their web site has added a final verse, not included in any of the publications I have seen. It however does encapsulate Fred Robinson's *Oahspean* thinking, which focussed on the younger generation, rather than older people. I include it here to reveal that continued interest exists in *Oahspe* amongst some 'Seekers' who now discuss it online:

16. Better is it to labour with a child from infancy, and thence to maturity, to teach it aright, than to strive with a score of conceited adults, and fail to redeem one (<http://www.seekeronline.org/journals/y2003/oct03.html>, accessed 7.3.2011).

The bolded verses above are ones that Fred Robinson himself both highlighted in his teachings and attempted to enact in his own life. For a time some young alignees

(including me) did think they should prepare to look after orphaned children.<sup>27</sup> Where they would come from was always a mystery – ‘*after cataclysmic imminent world changes*’ was Fred’s position. Outside the content of *Oahspe*, itself appropriating the familiar cultural power of Biblical prophecy, the way it was written invited the same sorts of ‘activating’ responses afforded Biblical text.

Two years after Newbrough had written *Oahspe*, and during the publicity surrounding its first publication, he explained the circumstances surrounding its writing. A two page letter, ‘How Oahspe was Written’, was published on January 21<sup>st</sup> 1883 in *The Banner of Light*, Boston, Massachusetts, pp. 2–3. This text was included as a manually attached typed addendum in the 1891 Edition I have;<sup>28</sup> and then as explanatory pamphlets placed inside later editions. Here Newbrough describes his personal experiences of uncontrolled ‘susceptibility to external power’ and his initial inability to control his hands from ‘flying off into these “tantrums”’, writing random messages. He recounts how his investigation of over 200 mediums – ‘I took them to my own house and experimented with them to my heart’s content’ – led him to a general dissatisfaction with Spiritualist communications:

I did not desire communication from friends or relatives, or information about earthly things. I wished to learn something about the spirit-world; what the angels did, how they travelled, and the general plan of the universe. So after a while I took it into my head that wise and exalted angels would commune better with us if we purified ourselves physically and spiritually (Newbrough 1883, p. 2).

Newbrough began a vegan dietary regime and an inner discipline of ‘recounting daily to my Creator my shortcomings in governing myself in thought and deed’ – a half-hour ritual. Within six years he reduced his weight from 250 pounds to 180 pounds. ‘My rheumatism was all gone, and I had no more headache. I became limber and sprightly. A new lease of life came over me’. He soon found a ‘new condition of control’; instead of just having angels hold his hands, he could now see and hear them. They directed

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<sup>27</sup> For a couple of months immediately after meeting Fred I began collecting baby clothes from opportunity shops. Without a baby in sight they quickly piled up. I soon made a gift of them to another op shop.

<sup>28</sup> This large hardback edition with ‘State Library of South Australia’ gold-stamped on the cover was presented to me by one of Fred Robinson’s ‘first wave’ students, Lucy Pringle, in 1972. She told me it was a rare copy and that the book itself had a history. I have been able to make out a faint hand written inscription: ‘Presented by the Trustees to the Children of Shalam’. Research into this particular book’s origin through the State Library of South Australia was unfruitful.

him to buy the latest technological gadget: ‘a typewriter, which writes by keys like a piano’. He applied himself industriously to this task with ‘indifferent success’; recalling a two year period when ‘angels were propounding me questions, which no mortal could answer very intelligently’; he looked back on those years as ‘an enigma ... perhaps to show me that man is but an ignoramus at best ... and ... waiting for constitutional growth to be good’ (Newbrough 1883, p. 2). He describes the morning when ‘the light struck both hands on the back and they went for the typewriter, for some fifteen minutes, very vigorously’. On one occasion he ‘accidentally (seemed accidental to me) looked out the window and beheld a line of light that rested on my hands extending like a telegraph wire towards the sky’ (ibid., p. 3). Newbrough claims to have seen three fully materialised hands over his head, and another angel with her hands on his shoulders: ‘My looking did not disturb the scene; my hands kept right on printing – printing’.<sup>29</sup> Told not to read the material, he continued in this vein for fifty weeks, before sunrise every day. When it was finished he was told to ‘read and publish the book *Oahspe*’. Continuing his dentistry practice and his vegan diet, Newbrough was convinced ‘that there are numberless persons who might attain to marvellous development if they would thus train themselves’ (ibid.). He finishes this letter to *The Banner of Light* with much the same advice that Fred Robinson gave to psychics and *sensitives* – and to the ‘New Agers’ of the 1970s:

A strict integrity to one’s highest light is essential to development. Self abnegation and purity should be the motto and discipline of everyone capable of angel communication (Newbrough 1883, *Banner of Light*, p. 3).

The influences of *Oahspe* – admitted by the Robinsons as enigmatic, and in parts almost unreadable – were to impact the lives of those who came to experience an alternative lifestyle in the Robinsons’ 1970s Communities, creating the sort of continuity of influence across generations of alternative living and belief, which this study will suggest is typical of the field. For so many of those invested in *revealed knowledge*, not least Fred Robinson, such ‘integrity’ included the drive to source any number of new potential sources of ‘truth’.

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<sup>29</sup> ‘Every morning, before sunrise, until December 15, 1881, John Ballou Newbrough wrote at his Sholes typewriter, at a speed physically almost impossible considering the crudity of this first typewriter, and finally the manuscript was complete’. This quote, along with the rest of the story, is essentially corroborated through the diary of the grandson of Edwin Augustus Davis (a confidante of Newbrough’s) and is told in ‘Addendum’ an article written by Ray Palmer in 1970 (<http://www.angelfire.com/in2/oahspe3/addendum.html>, accessed 7.3.2011).

*The Urantia Book*, first published in 1955 by The Urantia Foundation, Chicago, was the text which most informed Fred Robinson's *Modern Revealed Knowledge* presented to New Agers in the 1970s. While *Oahspe* inspired his actions, it was *The Urantia Book* which inspired his religious thinking, and, as the following two short quotes reveal, it takes a meta-perspective on human existence and faith:

At first life was a struggle for existence; now, for a standard of living; next it will be for quality of thinking, the coming earthly goal of human existence (*The Urantia Book* 1955, p. 910).

Is *faith* – the supreme assertion of human thought – desirable? Then must the mind of man find itself in that troublesome predicament where it ever knows less than it can believe (*ibid.*, p. 51).

*The Urantia Book* became the basis of Fred's theology and most of the charts he used as visual aids in his lectures. *The Urantia Book* purports to be the fifth epochal revelation for this planet (1955, pp. 1007–1008),<sup>30</sup> which it claims is called 'Urantia' (*ibid.*, p.1). The human author of this 2,097 page tome is undetermined. He/she, as Fred explained, saw themselves to have been merely '*a conduit for beings on a higher plane of existence who knew what they were talking about*' (Fred Robinson, pers. comm., 1970s). The book is broken into four Parts: 'Part I: The Central and Super Universes'; 'Part II: The Local Universe'; 'Part III: The History of Urantia'; and 'Part IV: The Life and Teachings of Jesus'. *The Urantia Book* is arranged as 196 'Papers', each presented by '*celestial personalities well qualified to teach the inhabitants of this backward planet*' as Fred put it to his audiences.

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<sup>30</sup> While claiming to be the 'most recent presentation of truth to the mortals of Urantia' (1955, p. 1008) the text does not claim to be complete: '... no revelation short of the attainment of the Universal Father can ever be complete' (*ibid.*). Claiming to be 'a composite presentation by many beings' (*ibid.*) it admits that all 'other celestial ministrations are no more than partial, transient, and practically adapted to local conditions of time and space' (*ibid.*). Recognising that this admission of its own fallibility 'may possibly detract from the immediate force and authority of all revelations' (*ibid.*) the author explains: 'the time has come on Urantia when it is advisable to make such frank statements even at the risk of weakening the future influence and authority of this, the most recent of the revelations of truth to the mortal races of Urantia' (*ibid.*). Fred Robinson, while being both certain and emphatic about the veracity of most of the *Revealed Knowledge* he shared, would, when questioned, follow this *Urantia Book* codicil, saying: '*A Revelation of Truth may seem absolute to us, but all truth is relative*' (Fred Robinson, pers. comm., and lectures 1970s). Such admissions were attractive to Fred's 1970s baby-boomer audiences, brought up on relative truth and the avoidance of dogmatic positioning.

This book had huge impact on the thinking of both the Robinsons and the members of the UBI Community. Fred recommended that Seekers work their way through Part IV: The Life and Teachings of Jesus (pp. 1323–2087). Readings and sermons based on sections of *The Urantia Book* contributed to an understanding of basic positions held to be ‘true’ – given the book’s own codicil. The following, an example of one such favoured section, goes to an understanding of the epistemological meta-issues of religious ‘faith’ and ‘belief’, echoed in the UBI tenets. The four paragraphs quoted here explore the voice and stance of *The Urantia Book*, while also exploring two words at the heart of any study within the religious domain – and especially that of New Religious Movements.

*Belief* has attained the level of faith when it motivates life and shapes the mode of living. The acceptance of a teaching as true is not faith; that is mere belief. Neither is certainty nor conviction faith. A state of mind attains to faith levels only when it actually dominates the mode of living. Faith is a living attribute of genuine personal religious experience. One believes truth, admires beauty, and reverences goodness, but does not worship them; such an attitude of saving faith is centred on God alone, who is all of these personified and infinitely more.

*Belief* is always limiting and binding; faith is expanding and releasing. Belief fixates, faith liberates. But living religious faith is more than the association of noble beliefs; it is more than an exalted system of philosophy; it is a living experience concerned with spiritual meanings, divine ideals, and supreme values; it is God-knowing and man-serving. Beliefs may become group possessions, but faith must be personal. Theologic beliefs can be suggested to a group, but faith can rise up only in the heart of the individual religionist.

*Faith* has falsified its trust when it presumes to deny realities and to confer upon its devotees assumed knowledge. Faith is a traitor when it fosters betrayal of intellectual integrity and belittles loyalty to supreme values and divine ideals. Faith never shuns the problem-solving duty of mortal living. Living faith does not foster bigotry, persecution, or intolerance.

*Faith* does not shackle the creative imagination; neither does it maintain an unreasoning prejudice toward the discoveries of scientific investigation. Faith vitalises religion and constrains the religionist heroically to live the golden rule. The zeal of faith is according to knowledge, and its strivings are the preludes to sublime peace (*Urantia Book* 1955, pp. 1114; <http://theuniversalfather.org/EnglishText/p101.htm#101:8>, accessed 6.3.2011).

The two extensive quotes from *Oahspe*, and *Urantia* (in the last four pages) are pivotal texts that determined the theology and the practice of the Robinsons’ schema. The styles of these teaching streams – one ancient sounding; the other more modern, reveal something of the range – even incongruity – of what became the Robinsonian canon.



The ‘Ascended Masters’ stream of texts, firstly Baird T. Spalding’s five volume set, *Life and Teachings of the Masters of the Far East*, first published in 1924 by DeVors & Co., Los Angeles; and secondly Guy Ballard’s “‘I AM’ Activity’ writings, particularly Volume 1: *Unveiled Mysteries* (1934); Volume 2: *The Magic Presence* (1934) and Volume 3: *The “I AM” Discourses* (1937), all under the pen name of Godfré Ray King, (and all published by the Saint Germain Press, Chicago, Illinois), were to be among the most influential of Mary Broun-Robinson’s textual contributions to Universal Brotherhood teachings and understandings – the word ‘belief’ was almost never used. These kinds of text can be seen as a type of creative non-fiction that has become known as *irrealism*.<sup>31</sup> The *irreal* stories told in these Spalding and Ballard texts proclaim many miracles purportedly experienced by the authors, while the teachings are designed to show reader-students how to bring about such miracles in their own lives, through a variety of power-generating techniques or ‘laws’. A further investigation of this stream of teachings is explored in Chapter 6 Part 2 ‘Ascended Master Groups and Affirmations’.

George Hunt Williamson’s *Secret of the Andes*, first published in 1961 by Neville Spearman, London (and reprinted six times by them until Corgi published it in 1973), was written under the pseudonym Brother Philip and was an important text for the Robinsons, and for many of the true-believing New Agers of the 1960s and early ’70s. It is through this text that that Mary Broun-Robinson garnered the idea of a *Modern Monastery*, a Universal Brotherhood – which could play a part in the ‘changes to come’ as a *Light-Centre* – a place of applied teaching, ready and waiting for the social and spiritual need. Other aspects of this text, and the movement to which it was connected, are explored in Chapter 7, Part 1, under the title ‘On Channelling Truth’.

As the spiritualist tradition moved forward to influence a new generation, David Spangler’s *Revelation: The Birth of a New Age*, published in 1971 by the Findhorn

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<sup>31</sup> Irrealism is a term that has been used by various writers in the fields of philosophy, literature, and art to denote specific modes of unreality and/or the problems in concretely defining reality ... it has generally been used to describe something which, while unreal, is so in a very specific or unusual fashion, usually one emphasising not just the ‘not real,’ but some form of estrangement from our generally accepted sense of reality ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irrealism\\_\(the\\_arts\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irrealism_(the_arts)), accessed 7.7.2011). Much of the Robinsons’ schema was derived from an array of texts, many of which could be classed as *irreal non-fiction*.

Foundation, Forres, Scotland, was the book that most connected me and my generation of New Age Seekers with the Robinsons. It explores the emergence of a ‘new consciousness’ that was seen to be arising within humanity. It focussed on living the qualities of ‘Limitless Love and Truth’, largely ignoring, even downplaying, apocalyptic prophecy, in line with the ideological and pragmatic idiom of the day. This is not to suggest however that the era moved entirely beyond attempts to achieve human transcendence. For the New Age generations, these too had transmuted into more scientised and material orientations – less elysian than utopian, and often marked by the space-exploration rhetoric and ‘oneness’ and ‘attunement’ imagery of the day. The part Spangler’s text played is taken up in Chapter 12, Part 1, ‘Life Before the Robinsons’.

Although Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird’s book *The Secret Life of Plants*, a *New York Times* best seller published by Harper and Row, New York, was not published until 1973, it needs to be included here for several reasons. Released during the early formation of the Carranya New Age Community, it seemed to prove the complementarities between the ‘scientific’ and the ‘spiritual’ which Fred Robinson talked about. Fred had already been an admirer of the people and issues surveyed in this text – as I was. In this way it had a consolidating affect on my own dedication to ‘*The Work*’. The book also linked organic and biodynamic threads of interest of the 1960s with that of Indian mystic Yogananda, whose book *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946, Self-Realisation Fellowship, Los Angeles) I had read just prior to meeting Fred Robinson. *The Secret Life of Plants* had many synchronisms with Fred’s schema. For instance, Fred in his lectures spoke about ‘*the law of protection*’, while Tompkins and Bird recalled that in the Californian earthquake of the 18<sup>th</sup> April 1906 which ‘reduced Santa Rosa to a mass of flaming splinters and rubble ... not a pane of glass in Luther Burbank’s huge greenhouse not far from the centre of town was even cracked’ (1973, p. 122). The book finished with a chapter about Findhorn, the Scottish New Age Community which had played a part in connecting me to Fred Robinson in 1971. In these ways *The Secret Life of Plants* connected a range of research texts, issues and influential figures, consolidating my own alignment with the Robinsons by linking the practical, social and political positions of my own generation to the more spiritual and cosmic orientation of Fred and Mary. Prophecy and the flying saucer issues which accompanied Fred’s vision seemed relatively harmless – even endearingly eccentric –

and they did have the affect of waking up his audiences. Fred's request to adopt *the open mind of a little child* challenged his alignees to at least accept the possibility of such cosmic happenings or prophecies coming to pass; in this way there was no need to 'believe' in his prophecies or the methods by which they might be enacted. All he asked was that we be open to them – just as readers were being opened to the propositions put in *The Secret Life of Plants*.

## **UFO Texts**

Fred and Mary Robinson had individually (in the 1950s) and then together (in the 1960s) researched UFOs, reading many of the early *Flying Saucer* authors. The following is a freight-train list of some of the titles (with publication details) that simply by being put together tell the story of the kind of research the Robinsons undertook: *The Coming of the Saucers* by Kenneth Arnold & Ray Palmer (1952, Amherst, Wisconsin); *Why We Are Here: Written by a BEING from JUPITER and Instrumented by Gloria Lee* (1959, Cosmon Research Foundation, Palos Verdes Estates, California); *Inside the Space Ships* (1955, Arco Publishers and Neville Spearman, London) and *Flying Saucers Farewell* (1961, Abelard-Schuman, New York) both written by George Adamski; *The White Sands Incident* and *Alan's Message to Men of Earth* by Daniel Fry (both published in 1954 by New Age Publishing, Los Angeles); *The Saucers Speak* by George Hunt Williamson & Alfred Bailey (1954, New Age Publishing, New York); and *Warnings from Flying Friends* by Arthur Shuttlewood (1968, Portway Press, Warminster, Wiltshire, UK). The Robinsons had been fully convinced of the authenticity of most of these authors' postulations and 'experiences', and worked to elaborate from within them a full-fledged set of transformative promises/processes for a new, spiritual and social 'elect' – *There is to be no 'elect' – you chose yourselves* (Fred Robinson, lectures 1971).

By the time I met Fred Robinson he had decided to recommend to seekers two overview books on the subject: *Flying Saucer Pilgrimage* by Helen and Bryant Reeves (1957) and *The Advent of the Cosmic Viewpoint* by Bryant Reeves (1965), both published by Amherst Press, Amherst, Wisconsin. The former introduces the topic of UFOs and surveys the 'evidence' the Reeves gathered on their own pilgrimage of investigation, while the latter focussed on interpreting 'the consequences' of UFO sightings and

contacts. That Bryant Reeves was a retired mechanical engineer was seen by Fred as conferring credibility on the subject of a ‘cosmic viewpoint’ – a term he adopted in his own teachings. He often read from Reeves (1965) as if from a textbook. Unusually for Fred and Mary, these two books were written by mere human researchers – in contrast with the enigmatic extraterrestrial sources of Fred’s two main reference books: *Oahspe* and *Urantia*. When Erich von Däniken’s *Chariots of the Gods: Was God an Astronaut?* (1971, Corgi Books, London) was released in English, the Robinsons saw it as passé; they had lost interest in ‘scientifically’ proving what they intuitively ‘knew’.

Assessing these works today, it is possible to see how the sincere enthusiasm and open-mindedness of the Reeves, when combined with the often charming and charismatic *Ufology* aficionados and ‘contactees’ they mixed with during their investigations, led to their becoming promoters of some questionable phenomena and exotic theories. Not unlike the Universal Brotherhood members, seen as supporters of all of Fred’s theories, the Robinsons too were too easily represented as embracing all of the tenets of the texts they recommended. In many cases, they were more interested in the less sensational, more directly pragmatic, aspects of such texts.

## **Political and Environmental Movement Texts**

Although Mary Broun read many mainstream political texts during her days with the Labor Party (including some of Karl Marx’s writing) which clearly influence both her trajectory and that of the UBI, she came to focus on the more right-wing economic theories which Fred Robinson had first gleaned from the writings of Major Douglas (1879–1952) and his book *Social Credit* (1924, Eyre & Spottiswoode, London). This, along with other books (which I have been unable to trace) accepted the authenticity of the spurious and anti-Semitic document by Sergei Nilus, *The Jewish Peril: Protocols of the Leaned Elders of Zion*, whose 1905 Russian edition was anonymously translated by George Shanks,<sup>32</sup> and printed in 1920 by Eyre & Spottiswoode, London. Eyre & Spottiswoode Ltd., at the time enjoyed the kudos of being the *King’s Printer*, thus experienced the dubious distinction of being the first to publish this text – and with the

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<sup>32</sup> Shanks was the son of a well-known English merchant residing in Moscow. As a result of the Russian Revolution of 1917, the family sustained financial ruin and became refugees in London where it is believed the translation was completed. Until 1978 it was believed that Victor E. Marsden was the translator; ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_Shanks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Shanks), accessed 30.7.2011).

additional title *The Jewish Peril*. However, as Norman Cohn points out the distinction must be made between a printer and publisher of the same name. The book, or rather pamphlet, shows that while it was ‘printed by Eyre & Spottiswoode Ltd’ to private commission in 1920, the firm Eyre & Spottiswoode (Publishers) Ltd was not founded until April 1929 (Cohn 1996, footnote 4, p. 167).<sup>33</sup> *The Protocols*, as this mother-of-all-conspiracy-theories is generally known, marked Fred Robinson’s bitter response to the economic-disasters he experienced in the early 1930s. While *Social Credit*’s more benign theories informed Fred’s ‘*economic answer to the world’s problem*’ (Lectures 1971), it was the raft of conspiracy theories which stemmed from *The Protocols* that were to have a more marked, but largely unrecognised effect on the Universal Brotherhood enterprise. A critique of *The Protocols*, along with its effect on Fred Robinson, his first family, and the later UBI will be explored in Chapter 5 Part 2.

By the 1970s Fred and Mary Robinson’s focus had reoriented to include environmental texts, albeit those with wide-ranging political consequences. Fred had read early organic and biodynamic literature and newsletters in Australia from the 1930s onwards, being involved to some extent with the biodynamic movement’s founders and practitioners. Fred Robinson met Mary Broun just after the publication of Rachael Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962),<sup>34</sup> a book which scientifically proved that much of what Fred had been saying about the state of the environment was coming to pass. By the time Fred met Mary in mid-November 1962 he was already quoting from Carson to confirm what he was saying.

By 1971 Fred was freely and selectively quoting from a range of ecologists and environmentalist as well as Carson. While Fred respected his new eco-scientific ‘allies’, his own research into the extraterrestrial science of ‘aliens’ suggested much more radical ‘solutions’ than any human scientists could envisage. Fred’s two favourite to-quote-from texts were Barry Commoner’s *The Closing Circle* (1971) and Paul Erlich’s

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<sup>33</sup> It was surely not an accident that Norman Cohn’s book *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish World Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was first published in 1967 by this first English language ‘printer’ of *The Protocols*: Eyre & Spottiswoode, London. To view a copy of the title page of *The Protocols* see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eyre\\_%26\\_Spottiswoode](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eyre_%26_Spottiswoode), accessed, 29.7.2011).

<sup>34</sup> *The New Yorker* had started serialising *Silent Spring* in June 1962. It was published by Houghton Mifflin, Boston on 27 September of that year. The book was widely read – especially after it was on *The New York Times* best-seller list. The book has been widely credited with helping launch the environmental movement ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silent\\_Spring](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silent_Spring), accessed 29.7.2011).

*The Population Bomb* (1968).<sup>35</sup> Fred used whatever he saw as useful to support his schema – and as with his earlier experiments in spiritual and communal living, he urged that environmental reform extend to new regimens within everyday existence.

## Lifestyle Texts

The International Biogenic Society was established in 1928; its credo, composed in Paris that year by the founders Edmond Bordeaux Szekely and Romain Rolland, is reproduced here, as it can be seen as a forerunner to a number of life style issues of both the back-to-the-land movement of the 1970s and the sustainability movement of today:

- We believe that our most precious possession is Life
- We believe we shall mobilise all the forces of Life against the forces of death.
- We believe mutual understanding leads toward mutual cooperation; that mutual cooperation leads toward Peace; and that Peace is the only way of survival for mankind.
- We believe that we should preserve instead of waste our natural resources, which are the heritage of our children.
- We believe that we should avoid the pollution of our air, water and soil, the basic preconditions of life.
- We believe that we should preserve the vegetation of our planet: the humble grass which came 50 million years ago and the majestic trees which came 20 million years ago, to prepare our planet for mankind.
- We believe that we should eat only fresh, natural, pure, whole foods, without chemicals and artificial processing.
- We believe that we should lead a simple, natural, creative life, absorbing all the sources of energy, harmony and knowledge, in and around us.
- We believe that the improvement of life and mankind on our planet must start with individual efforts, as the whole depends on the atoms composing it.
- We believe in the Fatherhood of God, the Motherhood of Nature, and the Brotherhood of Man (<http://www.communityofpeace.net/Britxt/Binternat.htm>, accessed 7.7.2011).

The similarities between Fred Robinsons 1970s propositions and the above credo is well worth noting, for it points to the synchronicity between Fred's generations programs of lifestyle reform (before and between Wars) and the baby-boomer interest in natural living and vegetarianism.

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<sup>35</sup> Commoner's 1971 book *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man, and Technology* (Knopf, New York) was at odds with Erlich's 1968 *The Population Bomb* (Sierra Club, San Francisco; Ballantine Books, New York) ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barry\\_Commoner#cite\\_note-2](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barry_Commoner#cite_note-2), accessed 29.7.2011).

While a number of Szekely's works (translated and edited by L. Purcell Weaver, and published by C.W. Daniel Company, London) were read by Fred early in his New Age career, one text stands out: *The Essene Gospel of Peace*, first published in English in 1937.<sup>36</sup> This enigmatically 'received' text revolves around the concept of a clean body – inside and out. It reinforced for Fred, in more romantic style, Heindel's 'spiritual scientific' reasons for both vegetarianism and purity of the bloodstream, issues which were to become touchstones of Fred's teachings during the 1970s. While the main innovation for my generation was the description of the 'ancient practice' of using an enema, its equation of spiritual purity with physical discipline and environmental self-reliance marked the holistic emphasis of the era. The book was republished in 1970, ready to be taken up by the back-to-nature sector of the baby-boomer generation – and thus fitting perfectly with Fred Robinson's suggestion to purify the bloodstream by fasting and colon cleansing.

With body as important as spirit, a range of alternative diet books influenced the Robinsons and the early 1970s pioneers of the Community. The following list of author and title details gives the flavour of these 'life extension specialist' texts: Anne Wigmore's *Be Your Own Doctor* (1969, Hippocrates Press, Boston, MA); Professor Arnold Ehret's *Mucusless Diet Healing System: Scientific Method of Eating Your Way to Health* (1953, Ehret Literature Publishing Company, New York) and Paul C. Bragg's *The Miracle of Fasting: For Agelessness – Physical, Mental and Spiritual Rejuvenation* (1971, Health Science, Sydney). For the Robinsons, diet – even when directed towards whole-of-life improvement – always tended towards more elevated spiritual dimensions.

Mohandas Gandhi's *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, was important for the Robinsons. Gandhi (1869–1948) was born only a dozen years before Fred, and Fred had followed his career with much interest. While Mahadev Desai, Gandhi's personal secretary, had translated this book into English for publication by Navajivan Press,

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<sup>36</sup> Publications of the International Biogenic Society, including *The Essene Gospel of Peace*, saw Szekely receive a PhD from the University of Paris, and other degrees from Vienna and Leipzig. Szekely claimed to have translated a text he discovered at the Vatican in 1923, called *The Essene Gospel of Peace* which he published in four parts over several decades ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edmund\\_Bordeaux\\_Szekely#Annotated\\_Bibliography](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edmund_Bordeaux_Szekely#Annotated_Bibliography), accessed 7.7.2011). The text is available at [http://www.thenazareneway.com/essene\\_gospel\\_of\\_peace\\_book1.htm](http://www.thenazareneway.com/essene_gospel_of_peace_book1.htm), accessed 25.5.2011.

Ahmedabad in 1929 (and Fred is likely to have read this edition), it was the 1948 edition, published by Public Affairs Press, New York that the Robinsons had when I met them in 1971. A number of Gandhi's statements about 'truth' were reprinted in the Robinsons' *Shalam Lights* to substantiate their own 'truth' positions. Fred often finished his 1970s lectures by reading a section from *The Urantia Book* titled 'Christianity's Problem' (pp. 2082–2083) which is strikingly similar to one of Gandhi's texts.<sup>37</sup>

Both Fred Robinson and Mary Broun saw in Gandhi a fellow seeker of truth – and had identified many parallels with their own 'experiments with truth'. My generation had also been drawn to Gandhian ideals, practised at his Ashram, Sabarmati, on the outskirts of Ahmadabad; along with political policies which extolled 'simple' village life. Gandhi became another point of connection; especially for me, as one of his Quaker confidants had been my own mentor just prior to meeting Fred.

Many of the issues the Robinsons had followed for decades became staples of the 1970s interest in the New Age. Books, magazines and tracts about why aluminium cooking utensils should not be used, or why fluoridated water should be avoided, had been

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<sup>37</sup> The wording of a number of *The Urantia Book* statements has been identified by critics as plagiarisms (Gardner 1995, pp. 321–357). Gardner specifically cites the following paragraph – one which Fred often quoted to his 1971 audiences – as being plagiarised from Gandhi (ibid., p. 355):

Christianity suffers a great handicap because it has become identified in the minds of all the world as part of the social system, the industrial life, and moral standards of Western civilisation; and thus has Christianity unwittingly seemed to sponsor a society which staggers under the guilt of tolerating science without idealism, politics without principles, wealth without work, pleasure without restraint, knowledge without character, power without conscience, and industry without morality (*Urantia Book* 1955, p. 2086)

The 'Seven Sins' of Gandhi's read: 1. Wealth without work; 2. Pleasure without conscience; 3. Knowledge without character; 4. Commerce without morality; 5. Science without humanity; 6. Worship without sacrifice; 7. Politics without principle (Gardner 1995, p. 355). Gardner recognises however that 'the supermortals openly admitted in the *UB* that they made use of human sources (ibid.). The celestial personality 'commissioned' to restate the 'The Life and Teachings of Jesus' in *The Urantia Book* saw the matter of unattributed appropriation of ideas as part of his/her methodology, saying, amongst a full-page of explanation and 'acknowledgements', the following:

In carrying out my commission to restate the teachings and retell the doings of Jesus of Nazareth, I have drawn freely upon sources of record and planetary information. As far as possible I have derived my information from purely human sources. Only when those records failed have I resorted to those records which are superhuman. When ideas and concepts of Jesus' life and teachings have been acceptably expressed by a human mind, I invariably gave preference to such apparently human thought patterns ... I have unhesitatingly appropriated those ideas and concepts, preferably human, which would qualify me to restate his matchless teachings in the most strikingly helpful and universally uplifting phraseology ... I most gratefully acknowledge our indebtedness to all sources of record and concept which have been hereinafter utilised in the further elaboration of our restatement of Jesus' life on earth (p. 1343).

In 1999 Gandhi's book was designated as one of the '100 most important spiritual books of the twentieth-century' while the *The Urantia Book* was unmentioned. The list was assessed by HarperCollins.



researched and ‘absorbed’; by the time I met Fred he was not recommending that his audiences spend time locating or studying source books on such subjects. Duplicating research he had already completed was *a waste of valuable time*. He simply suggested that for our own health and well-being we avoid them – along with the classic texts which discussed them. Having said this however, Fred himself would typically quote from a book on the subject, with the reference intact. While there is no extant record of many of these references, they would be used to corroborate the proposition that for instance, aluminium cooking utensils caused scores of diseases. An article (likely to be the one Fred quoted from) by H. J. Force, ‘Poisons Formed by Aluminium Cooking Utensils’ in *The Golden Age* (a magazine owned by the Jehovah Witnesses) asserts that aluminium pots are ‘a curse to humanity and their manufacture and use should be forbidden by law’ (November 1932, p. 35).<sup>38</sup>

Fluoride poisoning was another emotionally charged subject for Fred Robinson. The intensity of the texts from which he quoted, along with their conspiratorial accusations, loomed large for Fred’s listeners of the early 1970s. For instance a 1954 letter written by Charles Perkins to a research foundation, states that Nazi Germany had experimented with fluoride to control the population by the following method:

Repeated doses of infinitesimal amounts of fluoride will in time reduce an individual’s power to resist domination, by slowly poisoning and narcotising a certain area of the brain, thus making him submissive to the will of those who wish to govern him (Charles Perkins, letter to the Lee Foundation for Nutritional Research, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, October 2 1954).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Qualified scientists contributing to anti-cult/counter-cult web sites critical of the Jehovah Witnesses’ theological positions and ‘quack medical nostrums’ refute these claims suggesting that ‘(T)oday their former stand is seen as extremely foolish even by the Watchtower themselves’; and that such positions were taken ‘due to the tendency of certain high level Watchtower officials to reject anything that was orthodox – orthodox religion, orthodox science, and orthodox medicine’ (Jerry Bergman, 1996, in ‘Aluminum: Satan’s Metal and Killer of Millions? *The Watchtower’s Incredible Crusade Against Aluminum*’, <http://www.seanet.com/~raines/papers.html>, accessed 1.8.2011). Fred’s own rejection of almost all orthodox positions was perhaps, at least in part, influenced by the *Golden Age* and *Watchtower* magazines he read from the 1930s to the 1960s.

<sup>39</sup> Perkins’ story, that fluoride made it more difficult for affected persons to defend their freedoms becoming more docile towards authority, has been mitigated by more recent in-depth research such as Hans Moolenburgh’s *Fluoride: The Freedom Fight* (1987) :

Scientists in the camps of both the opponents and proponents have always dismissed this story as mere poppycock, but it had a life of its own and reared its head time and again. It fed the suspicions of many people that ‘there was more to fluoridation than meets the eye’ (pp. 51–52).

Quoting from such ‘insider’ texts as Perkins’ letter was very convincing to 1970s baby-boomers. Fred was an avid researcher – especially of conspiracies of every kind. His keen sense of the interconnectedness of the ideas he professed extended however to a view that knowledge was suppressed or concealed as often as it was revealed.

At one level, these interconnected threads of reading helped cement community consensus. The fifth printing of *How to Grow Vegetables and Fruits by the Organic Method* (1970, Rodale Books, Emmaus, Pennsylvania) was embraced by both the Robinsons and me, a source of uncomplicated conversation between us in the early days of our meeting. Ruth Stout’s books, beginning with *How to have a Green Thumb without an Aching Back: A New Method of Mulch Gardening* (1955, Exposition Press, New York) was another first influence – on a very mundane human level. It was practical, down-to-earth, *how to* books such as these which helped ground prospective members, both prior to and during the establishment of the Community. Discussion about practical issues, raised through reading a raft of such books and magazines, tended to bring Community members together. Less applied or material matters, including for instance prophecies and channelled literature, tended to cause divisions (even if unexpressed). The (re)combination of sources proceeded however, the pragmatic content tending to validate the spiritual for my generation, while being treated as practical application of the more central belief systems to the Robinsons. Somewhere between, community emerged.

*The Whole Earth Catalogue* was part of my own alternative reading between 1969 and 1971 prior to meeting Fred Robinson.<sup>40</sup> These catalogues prepared the late 1960s and early 1970s counterculture readership in Australia for the take-up of two pivotal Australian alternative publications of the period. The first to appear was the back-to-the-land magazine *Earth Garden*, the first issue of which appeared in February 1972 with a feature article on Fred Robinson’s ideas about barter: ‘Honey is Money’. The New Age

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<sup>40</sup> This was a compendium of tools, texts and information that sought to catalyse the emergence of a realm of personal power by making soft technology available to people eager to create sustainable communities. The *Whole Earth Catalogs* publication coincided with a wave of experimentalism, convention-breaking, and do-it-yourself attitudes associated with the 1970s *counterculture*, back-to-the-land and communities movement in the US and beyond ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stewart\\_Brand](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stewart_Brand), accessed 12.9.2009).

spirituality paper/magazine *Cosmos*,<sup>41</sup> included a number of feature articles about both Fred Robinson and the Shalam-Carranya Communities (see for instance Yvonne Malykke's interview with Fred and Robinson and Rosemary Wood, titled 'Shalam – Carranya', March 1974, p. 6). The way these alternative Australian magazines were to inform and connect with Fred Robinson's target audience is examined in Chapter 12.

Overall there proved, as this study will suggest, a divergence between what might be termed a 'Robinsonian' trajectory through such texts, oriented towards the spiritual or metaphysical; and that of my own generation: pragmatic, tending towards the scientific, and always politically applied – with a focus on back-to-the-land lifestyle issues.

## Fiction

Curiously, the reverse appears true when it come to the UBI Community's use of narrative fiction. By the time the Robinsons met in 1962, neither Fred nor Mary read many, if any, novels, focussing instead on both *channelture* and non-fiction research about the many subjects they were passionate about. They absorbed stories more through television and films. Reading was for 'The Work', and in any case, the message behind the unreal non-fiction texts being read by the Robinsons was that *Truth was stranger than fiction*. On the other hand those who came to the Community were steeped in allegorical fantasies such as Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* (1965) trilogy,<sup>42</sup> which the Robinsons never read and saw as a waste of time. Tolkien was not recommended reading – even being banned for a time in the early 1980s – being seen as 'out of the consciousness'.

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<sup>41</sup> *Cosmos* was founded in June 1973 and published monthly until July 1983 with circulation in eighteen countries. It pioneered New Age spirituality in Australia. *Cosmos* was the first national journal of its kind to be published in Australia and was distributed nationwide through newsagents. It was the forerunner to many similar publications (<http://yvonnemalykke.com/>, accessed 30.7.2011).

<sup>42</sup> *The Lord of the Rings* is a high-fantasy epic written by University of Oxford professor J. R. R. Tolkien ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Lord\\_of\\_the\\_Rings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lord_of_the_Rings), accessed 8.7.2011). *The Lord of the Rings* has had a profound and wide-ranging impact on popular culture, beginning with its first publication in the 1950s, but especially throughout the 1960s and '70s, during which time young people embraced it as a countercultural saga (Feist 2001, *Meditations on Middle-earth*, St. Martin's Press, New York).

There were exceptions however; the science fiction book, *The People: No Different Flesh* by Zenna Henderson<sup>43</sup> (1967, Doubleday, New York) was seen by Fred and Mary Robinson to describe both the Community and the extra-terrestrials which would be part of the planet's New Age future. The book was read cover to cover at group meetings during the late 1970s, and was to remain on the recommended reading list as one of the (re) orientation texts suggested to Seekers.

H.G. Wells's science fiction was the most influential of Fred Robinson's boyhood and early adult reading. Wells's influence on Fred is explored in Chapter 5 Part 1. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1949) and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1950) were also to provide Fred with useful tropes for his countercultural views; he often spoke about these texts to his audiences in the 1970s – perhaps aware of their new cult status for young readers through the political upheavals of the 1960s.

It is important to note that throughout all these streams of literature (and indeed other sub-categories that could easily expand the list), an alternative, countercultural positioning is evident. The Robinsons' focus was on how things could, and should and *would* be done differently, if together we could ground their evolving vision via a spiritual yet practical alternative society. Their mantra: *We are here to practicalise the spiritual and spiritualise the commercial* makes sense of the wide-ranging topics that informed the UBI's 'insider' literature-bank.

## Outsider Literature

With the UBI arising within this selective yet global mesh of influences, it is important to consider how existing research has positioned both the UBI and these sorts of movements as a whole. The Universal Brotherhood, it will be argued, needs to be considered from within existing studies of alternative Intentional Communities, the New Age, and New Religious Movements – with a focus on an Australian context. Existing categorisations and typologies help place both the protagonists (the subjects) and the

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<sup>43</sup> Zenna Charlson Henderson (1917–1983) was an American fiction and fantasy novella and short story author. Although her work could not be considered feminist, Henderson was one of the few writers in the 1950s and 1960s writing science fiction from a female perspective. She often included religious themes because her readers, particularly her young readers, liked them. She felt it was good to offer a word for "Our Sponsor" in her stories. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zenna\\_Henderson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zenna_Henderson), accessed 8.7.2011).

Universal Brotherhood Community more generally within the existing research – initially to locate and analyse any distinctive differences.

Key research texts can help typify, and place the Universal Brotherhood within the social and ideological matrix in which it functioned. They set the stage for the story of how the group came into being, influencing its formation and direction by the co-founders, as explored in the Chapters that follow.

## **The UBI as a Back-to-the-land Intentional Community**

This was the starting-point of most of those who became members of ‘the group’ in the early 1970s. Most ‘Seekers’ were looking for a rural *alternative commune*, away from the mainstream, where they could ‘lead a simple life’, growing organic food. A number of the early Members were drawn from participants who attended Nimbin’s Aquarian Festival in May 1973. Contemporary texts set the scene of this alternative back-to-the-land collective at the time Fred Robinson and the Communities he inspired were in their ascendancy.

Margret Smith’s and David Crossley’s (eds) *The Way Out: Radical Alternatives in Australia* (1975, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne), assisted by Peter and Sandra Cock, presented fifty-four articles on radical social initiatives in Australia, categorised into thirteen sections. The editor’s introduction is headed ‘Is There a Way Out?’ As they depict the contributions, they reflect on the eclectic and enthusiastic mood of the times:

Their articles argue out a coherent, yet extremely diverse, philosophy of practical alternatives to improve our present day society. Only a short time ago such ideas seemed utopian and unrealistic (Smith & Crossley 1975, p.1).

It should be noted that the attitude towards spirituality within the counter-culture of the time was equally positive. Even the tropes used to depict the whole movement have a spiritual flavour: ‘To some extent the “counter-culture” and the “alternative society” has [sic] been a millennial dream’ (ibid.). The Robinsonian response can be detected in the echoing of Fred’s maxim: *We are not here to combat the negative but to establish the positive.*

The movement was not simply a reaction against modern western society; it also sought to be a positive confirmation of a way of life in which the individual was liberated. Self-evolution was the main goal, in contradiction to the self-negation and alienation which was seen to be the existing norm (ibid., pp. 1–2).

When *The Way Out* was published in 1975, Fred was at the height of his popularity, and was supported by the Shalam and Carranya Communities, widely acknowledged then as among the most successful alternative community ventures in the country. Certainly that is how the press of the day was depicting it, as we shall see.

Peter Cock's contribution: 'Radical Change – An Alternative Strategy' (ibid., pp. 5–12) argued for urgent action.

If we sit back and let present social forces carry us along, the dehumanised hell of Orwell's *1984* or Huxley's *Brave New World* is likely. What we do today contributes to the realities of tomorrow. If our humanity, let alone our existence, is to survive in the future, then the future cannot be left to itself.

If we have been able to revolutionise ourselves, and create our own alternative social environment, then this alternative, this living model will attract others through its pulling power, particularly those presently disaffected (Cock, 1975, p.10).

Cock, within the 'Living Styles' section of *The Way Out*, this time about a group he helped to start, contributed an article titled 'Moora Moora Cooperative Community' (pp. 185–193) in which he eloquently expressed the almost impossible ideal of finding a 'balance' between the manifold factors and issues which compete within a live-in community based on a higher level of liberty, equality and fraternity – and equity:

Our basic needs, in order to realise goals and enhance our own power over our lives are sufficient space, land, time and people. With a style of living that involves diversity, openness, freedom and participation, we aim to continually work on the balance of our diverse and often conflicting individual and collective needs. We seek a dynamic balance between privacy and community, homogeneity and diversity, cooperation and private ownership, and between our inner community life and our wider social involvement.

We need complexity and diversity to find freedom; commonality and similarity for community; and openness for growth. Each we feel is vital to the meaning and richness of the other, and the dynamics of combining them will give our lives the richness and meaning we strive for (Cock 1975, p. 193).

The above can almost be seen as a manifesto for Australian Communities; the inevitable failure to achieve such 'balance', is perhaps the main reason that most closely-knit intentional communities do not last very long. Certainly the issues raised by Cock were

important in both the functioning and the critiquing of the UBI in the 1970s and '80s – and in the assessment of NRMs in the twenty-first century.

Johnny Allen, a co-organiser and originator of the Nimbin Aquarius Festival, in his contribution to *The Way Out*, 'Nimbin: Myths, Dreams and Mysteries' (1975, pp. 28–31) reflects on the Nimbin Aquarius Festival to which Fred had been formally invited by Allen (letter, February 1973), and from which the fledgling Carranya Community was to gain a number of its members:

... the participants of Nimbin were not slow to enter the new mood. 'In a revolution there are no spectators' – only participants. And the prevailing mood was of participation. Aquarian Age children of the dream, sneering, cop-hating revolutionaries, spacemen, Jesus Christs, Fred Robinsons, all were there prepared to make an art out of the very act of living ...

So there we were, all of us balanced on the delicate tightrope between our fondest dreams and our most feared nightmares. Nothing was missing from the whole horrendous, ecstatic collage that is living in the seventies, except that we are usually buffeted from the intensity of it all by the massive mediocrity which blunts our senses and the personal cocoons we weave around ourselves in order to survive in the jungle.

The vibes were so tangible that, as the cliché goes, you could reach out and touch them. Never before was the new age peace and brotherhood more believable. In the euphoria of green fields, blue skies, people and music, love became tangible. It was passed round with each piece of fruit, each note of music, each soft caress. One by one the defences of cynicism were lowered, as we gave one another licence to dream and to love, to rediscover and redefine these experiences. But gradually through the euphoria came the realisation of conflict, the coming-of-age dilemma of the liberation movements. The realisation given new meaning by the Aquarian age cold war between meat eaters and vegetarian, that one man's meat is another man's poison (Allen 1975, p. 28).

This recognition of the 'conflict' caused by the activist liberation movements, here set up as both a contrast and an evolutionary phase of the 'new mood' of the communal 'dream', expresses something of the tension already embedded into a broad social movement attempting to integrate so many influences and demands. As this study will show, conflicts between the Robinsons' version of a New Age lifestyle and the various alternative countercultural or hippie versions, were present from the outset. The Robinsons were anti-drug, anti-smoking, anti-free sex, anti-nudity, and even anti-swearing (all of which were in their way, 'anti-hippie' and 'anti-freedom'). From their own perspective the Robinsons were simply *for* a wholesome, positive, alternative, spiritual lifestyle, undermined by a world-wide conspiracy which worked against true freedom, and against practices that supported 'real' love and truth. What was

incorporated into these ‘truths’ however came to be influenced by any number of marginalised or demonstrably suppressed other forms of ‘truths’ – not all of them easily embraced by the post-Nimbin ‘Aquarian’ generation.

David Fosdick’s contribution in *The Way Out*, ‘Spiritual Living in Western Australia (1975, pp. 183–184),<sup>44</sup> while a toned down version of Fred’s flamboyant rhetoric, used enough religious language to make it clear that the Shalam and Carranya Communities were in the process of disconnecting from the countercultural and alternative focus of other secular communes in Australia:

Life on earth was meant to be a very practical and objective experience, but without an understanding of why we are here and what we should be doing, it soon becomes a very hollow and selfish existence. Total dedication to a purely passive spiritual life can become just as selfish and lacking in the true dynamic purpose which the creative indwelling spirit wholly desires. If a balance can be reached between these two poles of human expression then the way will be open for humanity to express the spiritual values and understanding of the organised Heavens in physical and purely objective terms here on earth.

This has been the message Fred and Mary Robinson have been trying to convey to the people of Australia for quite a number of years. It was this message of Love and Truth that inspired approximately 65 people to come together at both Shalam (the mother community 32 kilometres from Perth) and Carranya (its flourishing offspring 272 kilometres north of Perth) to put into practice the Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God as an actual way of life (Fosdick 1975, p. 184).

Bill Metcalf’s (ed.), *From Utopian Dreaming to Communal Reality: Cooperative Lifestyles in Australia* (1995, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney) included ten individual accounts of those who had experienced living a communal lifestyle. In his introductory chapter, ‘A Brief History of Communal Experimentation in Australia’ (pp. 14–40) Metcalf devotes a page to the Robinsons and the history of Shalam and Carranya, sketching the evolution and demise of the Universal Brotherhood Community (pp. 36–37). However, he relies only on one press report of 1973, and a couple of quoted paragraphs from the Introduction to Black’s PhD Thesis (1984) for his

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<sup>44</sup> At the time of writing, the then still informal group was colloquially identified as ‘Fred’s Commune’. In the ‘Contributors List’ of *The Way Out*, Fosdick is described as living in ‘the Shalam and Carranya Communities’. The name ‘Universal Brotherhood Inc.’ did not exist, nor had the two Communities consolidated at Balingup. However, Fosdick refers to the group as both a ‘New Age Light Centre’ and as the ‘Shalam and Carranya Brotherhood’. The gradual shift in naming from the personal and colloquial – ‘Fred’s Commune’ – to the impersonal religious corporation ‘The Universal Brotherhood’ was to trigger a change. It was not long before the UBI was known as ‘The Brotherhood’ – an entirely different connotation to its roots in the alternative back-to-the-land milieu.



depictions, focussing almost exclusively on Fred's 'Space Brother' intervention theories; mentioning them six times in the one page, as if there were no other important dimension to the group. Without any insider input, his depictions are un-representative of the group, although largely factual in content. Notwithstanding, Metcalf does provide a useful historical overview of the territory of Intentional Communities in Australia, making the following salient point in the first sentence of his Chapter:

The alternative lifestyle, or intentional community, movement did not start in Australia at Nimbin in the early 1970s, briefly flourish and then die, as is so often assumed by ill-informed journalists. Australia has a rich history of utopian experimentation, one which is largely neglected in the history we are taught at school. Australia's utopian and communal past is largely unknown even to contemporary communards who, at times, mistakenly think their movement emerged with no historical antecedents (Metcalf 1995, p. 15).

It was partly Metcalf's observation that encouraged me to record the histories of the founders of the Universal Brotherhood – to reveal more of the movement's motivations and genesis than was available in the extant research. It became clear to me that the historical representation of defunct groups such as the UBI is as much the responsibility of those who were initially involved, as those 'outsider' historians and researchers who attempt to represent them. If the 'insider' founders and members simply *move on* with their lives, never writing about their experience and what shaped the groups they helped form, then the emplotted media versions are likely to be reified.

Metcalf's overview of the Australian utopian communitarian literature from the nineteenth century reveals a rich engagement with utopian and science-fiction 'high-tech' themes, including South Australian Catherine Helen Spence's short story *A Week in the Future* (1888), set in 1988, as perhaps the most important (Metcalf 1995, p. 15). Metcalf suggests that a general atmosphere of utopianism among Australian workers had existed since the gold rushes of the 1850s, when 'Men of ideas had come to this land in search of their fortune, Chartists from England, Irish rebels, German revolutionists' (Mathews 1954, p. 15). Utopianism has been an important part of Australia's history.<sup>45</sup> Citing Vance Palmer's *Legends of the Nineties* (1954, Melbourne

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<sup>45</sup> It is worthwhile documenting here that John Ballou Newbrough (1828–1891), who channelled and published the *Oahspe Bible*, had, in 1849 as a 21 year old, joined the gold rush to California where, as well as being a successful miner, he championed the civil rights of cruelly exploited Chinese labourers. He is likely to have done the same when 'with his friend John Turnbull, from Scotland, he prospected in the goldfields of Australia' (Gardner 1995, p. 162).

University Press, Melbourne) Metcalf suggests that the impulse towards utopianism ‘was at once a sign of faith in the future and uncertainty about the present’ (Palmer 1954, p. 70; in Metcalf, 1995, p. 15). Australians however did more than think about utopian communities:

Australians did not just write and dream of creating new, utopian social orders; they attempted to put their dreams into reality. There were 50 utopian, communal social experiments in Australia prior to 1970 (Metcalf 1995, p.16).

Metcalf goes on to describe their successes and failures. The 1890s, as ‘the high point of Australia utopianism’ (Metcalf 1995, p. 18); and the 1970s, which can be seen as the highpoint of Australia’s ‘Aquarian’ back-to-the land communal experimentation, show important similarities. Both rode a wave of utopianism instigated by environmental and social issues. The 1890s experienced severe drought, economic depression, and violent labour unrest (Metcalf 1995, pp. 18–19); while the 1970s experienced the Vietnam War Protests, the 1973 oil crisis (and its long term implications), and the double-dissolution of the Australian Parliament (1975), all of which contributed to a rise of activism and the desire to do something – especially environmentally.<sup>46</sup>

Both ‘waves’ were able to utilise a radical press to popularise and promote their ideas to their target audiences. In the 1890s magazines such as the *The Bulletin*, *The Boomerang*, *The Voice*, *The Clipper*, *The Worker*, and various club magazines popularised the movements (Metcalf 1995, p. 18); while in the 1970s the underground press, *The Alternative News Service*, *The Digger*, *The New Journalist* (Smith 1975, p. 238) and *The Living Daylight* (late ’60s and early ’70s only), connected the ‘counterculture’, while the back-to-the land magazines *Earth Garden* and *Grass Roots*; the New Age magazine *Cosmos*, and the popular music magazine *Go-Set* were to play an important part in popularising the alternative wave and Fred Robinson.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> By the mid-1970s, many felt that an environmental catastrophe was imminent; the Back-to-the-land movement started to form; and ideas of environmental ethics joined with anti-Vietnam War sentiments and other political issues. The individuals involved in this movement often lived outside normal society ... (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Environmentalism>, accessed 24.2.2011).

<sup>47</sup> Mainstream press, along with the electronic media, played a significant role in informing the public about the news-worthy activities of the counterculture, but a lesser role in connecting and informing participants about the theories and mystical positions of the movement(s). The editor of *Cosmos*

The 1890s produced William Lane (1861–1917) a radical journalist, and a political leader who founded the communal experiment ‘New Australia’. Similarities between Fred and Mary Robinson and the UBI Community, and Lane and his New Australia movement are hard to ignore. Lane, like Fred Robinson, was a charismatic speaker but an incompetent administrator and leader (Metcalf 1995, p.19). Like Fred he was also bold: ‘... if we only dare we shall win and if we win we shall have brought Faith and Hope to the world’ (Lane, quoted in *The Brisbane Worker*, 6.8.1962). Like Mary Robinson, Lane had been much involved in the Labour Movement prior to his communitarian work.<sup>48</sup>

Believing Eastern Australia to be too corrupt, Lane negotiated with the Paraguayan Government a grant of a tract of fertile land on which to start a utopian colony. For the 700 Australians who joined the movement ‘it seemed heaven was about to be realised on earth – in Paraguay’ (Metcalf 1995, p. 19). In 1893 the first group of 220 Australians set sail to establish their utopia. Problems soon arose over Lane’s leadership, as well as his strict rules against the use of alcohol, and sexual relations ‘with the “Indians”’ (ibid.). His ‘simplistic communism and mateship developed a non-denominational but distinctly religious tinge’ (ibid.). After the arrival of a second contingent a schism occurred: ‘The crooked ones will have to go’, he wrote. The splinter group, Cosmé, formed a community nearby, and was more successful and long-lived than Lane’s New Australia. Both groups continued to interact socially and economically until Lane abandoned his dream in 1899 and went to live in New Zealand.<sup>49</sup> Cosmé continued until 1905, when due to internal bickering it deteriorated. In 1909 private ownership was

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complained that: ‘By January, 1974 not one magazine or newspaper in Australia, except for *Cosmos* had featured an article on consciousness expansion, ESP, yoga or mysticism’ (Malykke 1996, p. 24).

<sup>48</sup> Lane, a political force in Australia, was largely responsible for the formation in 1889 of the Australian Labour Federation (<http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A090663b.htm>, accessed, 24.2.2011).

<sup>49</sup> Not dissimilar to Fred Robinson in relation to his days as a Rosicrucian naturist, Lane revealed little of his feelings about New Australia and Cosmé:

His career on Auckland’s conservative *New Zealand Herald*, from 1900 as leader writer and from 1913 as editor, clearly demonstrated a political volte-face. His writings under the pseudonym of ‘Tohunga’ (the Maori word for prophet) ... denounced industrial lawlessness, advocated the introduction of universal military training, and when war came showed himself a master of patriotic rhetoric (Souter 1983, <http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A090663b.htm>, accessed 24.2.2011).

instated. New Australian descendents are still living in Paraguay and Cosmé is now a farming village (Metcalf 1995; Souter 1983)

## **The UBI as New Age Movement**

An explanation of the epistemological shifts supporting New Age eclecticism is elaborated by David Tacey in a number of books, particularly *The Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia* (1995), *ReEnchantment: The New Australian Spirituality* (2000) and *The Spirituality Revolution: The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality* (2003). These suggest that the postmodern enterprise of the post-Paris revolution French intellectuals of the 1960s ‘loosened the structures of rationality’ (2003, p. 16), and so allowed openings for the return of mystery and spirituality, via such ‘operationalising’ impulses as the ‘Age of Aquarius’ in the same period. Recalling Jung’s response to hostile attacks on Theosophy, Tacey notes that the ‘New Age’ (viewed as a contemporary extension of Theosophy) ‘may be a prelude to a deeper and more mature kind of spiritual awareness’ (2003 p. 70). Rather than berating the New Age for its intellectual fuzziness and overloaded conceptual and ideological baggage, he suggests patience and tolerance, ‘in the hope that they shed their nascent forms and give rise to something new’ (2003, p. 70). Cautioning intellectuals intent upon an evaluative historical analysis, Tacey suggests: ‘We must be careful how we respond to the New Age, because it could hold within itself the seeds of the genuinely prophetic’ (2003, p. 70); likening the impulse behind the New Age to that which first inspired Marxism:

Both strive for liberation, seek to identify and attack the sources of alienation, and look to a revolutionary program. But these philosophies are working on different levels. Youth spirituality is seeking a primordial level of experience upon which the battle against alienation can be won. It is a postmodern, post-utopian political movement, but it is political in an entirely new sense (Tacey 2003, p. 70).

So was the UBI a ‘New Age’ political movement? My research reveals that the Robinsons were from the 1960s both organised and political; and that the UBI was designed by them to implement a distinctive kind of mystical, peaceful-revolutionary example/model for what was thought to be an imminent ‘New Age’. In this sense the UBI was more of a movement than the New Age movement itself, which the following research argues was more of a loose collective.

Steven Sutcliffe's *Children of the New Age: A History of Spiritual Practices* (2003), traces the history of some of the main New Age sources of the Robinsons – particularly Findhorn's genesis. In a number of ways his approach is similar to that taken here. Using some of his own experiences within New Age circles, Sutcliffe follows the personnel, events and movements out of which Findhorn evolved, extrapolating and theorising from the 'insider' data. Sutcliffe's research informed some of my thinking about the place of the Back-to-the-land, Intentional Community and New Age initiatives in Australia. Employing Sutcliffe's theory, these three movements were not, sociologically speaking, movements at all, but rather ideological, social and spiritual impulses that were drawn together in the Robinsons' evolving organisation. Sutcliffe's 'genealogy of "New Age"' (2003, p. 1) argues that there was never a New Age Movement as such. 'New Age' was first an 'emblem' and later an 'idiom', and is best seen as a *fad*. Sutcliffe, quoting Turner and Killian, points out that 'fad' and 'craze' should not be read derogatively but anthropologically:

a fad does not consist of simple, unimaginative imitation. It has collective enthusiasm for a wide range of individual innovation around a common theme, in behaviour that is performed in association with others (1972, p. 130).

Despite the sociological distinctions, it is unlikely that the term New Age movement will be dropped in scholarly, media, or public discourse for 'fad' or 'craze'. However, used in analysis such terms allow for

... a substantial latitude of belief and practice while maintaining a minimum common reference point, supplied by the emblem itself. In short, 'New Age' has been a discursive emblem used *within* certain networks of alternative spirituality rather than constituting an entity in itself ... (Sutcliffe 2003, p. 2003).

This study supports and supplements Sutcliffe's work, piecing together a parallel world of Australian New Age history that makes significant connections with his story of the evolution of the New Age in the British Isles. Importantly, Sutcliffe reveals the differences between the pioneer New Age messengers and their apocalyptic messages, in publications such as Anthony Brooke's *Revelation for the New Age* (1967); and those of the then young American mystic David Spangler, *Revelation: The Birth of a New Age* (1971) (see Sutcliffe 2003, pp. 114–124). Spangler is seen to have discouraged Findhorn from cataclysmic *Armageddon* discourses (*ibid.*, pp. 120–121), which the

Robinsons continued to employ, and which was to make many (if not most) of the UBI members uncomfortable.

Sutcliffe unwittingly thus reveals how the UBI became caught between two quite different paradigms: the *born-between-the-Wars New Age pioneers* who believed the New Age would be ushered in via world-wide cataclysm, overseen by ‘Elder Brothers’ or ‘Space People’; and the baby-boomer New Age inheritors who proclaimed that the New Age had already arrived, and that self-development and *building the new* should be the focus – a distinction which becomes an important element of this study (see especially Chapters 12 and 13). This inter-connectedness of motifs and understandings very much marks the entire evolution of the UBI, from its Robinsonian pre-history to its current day inheritor-institutions. So it is, in tracing this specifically Australian instance of an eclectic set of influences, part countercultural and communal, part New Age and part NRM, this study proposes continuity with other global NRM phenomena, particularly in relation to the metaphysical sub-section of *Ufology*.

Three distinct and very different positions regarding Ufology are evident. Firstly, the position taken by Fred and Mary Robinson regarding the ‘Space People’ or ‘Elder Brothers’ – a stance which stems directly from (quite literally) *insider-flying-saucer* authors. Secondly, the position taken by researchers of UFOs at a physical level; the focus being on the witness-based data collected about particular incidents, and the history of UFO groups in Australia. Bill Chalker’s *The Oz Files* (1996, Duffy & Snellgrove, Sydney) undertakes such a history. Thirdly, the position of those who take a postmodern position on UFOs: Martin Plowman’s (2008) ‘High Strangeness: A Lacanian Cultural History of UFOs and Ufology’ (unpublished PhD thesis, Melbourne University, Melbourne) and his subsequent book, *The UFO Diaries: Travels in the Weird world of High Strangeness* (2011, Allen and Unwin) explore the discourse used amongst Ufologists to outline their experiences, positions and theories as ‘true believers’. In describing his stance he says:

I am not a ufologist, but I am a ufology-ologist, and proud of it. I do not believe in the theories of ufologists, even if I find the stories they tell fascinating (Plowman 2011, xiii).

At the end of his book, which follows his PhD field research experiences, as well as providing a survey of the literature, Plowman reveals his own personal and enigmatic, if not ambivalent, position, advising:

Don't listen so much to what ufology says, as to what it wishes for. Which is this, the only dictum of high strangeness worth writing down: *This is not everything there is*. That's what I strive to defend. I take the side of the real and what it gives us, and for that reason I celebrate the existence of ufology without believing a word of it ... I refuse to defend ufologists, but when a witness says they saw something they can't explain, I think that's the first sign of truth ... I am satisfied that UFOs are and always have been real, even if they don't exist (Plowman 2011, p. 291).

While the Robinsons' undivided focus was on their 'experiential-insider' positioning, and Plowman's on a 'theoretical-outsider' position, something more should be said about the second position, which focuses on tabulating 'real' and verifiable phenomena. Genuine UFO researchers have often come in for 'cult-like' stereotyping just because they are investigating a 'weird' subject. Chalker distances himself from both unreasonable belief and unreasonable disbelief :

It has been clear to me from the very beginning of my research that a true sceptical position is the best approach taken in the true tradition of science, directed by the evidence and not by the dogma from the zealots of both the UFO and sceptical fraternities. Sceptical groups seem more intent on practising debunking than in true scepticism (Chalker 1996, p. 2).

The approach taken by the Robinsons, and those who accepted the 'insider stories' that assume the extraterrestrial origin of flying saucers, is seen by Chalker as making an 'unstainable leap ... I prefer the term UFO, with the emphasis on 'U' for "unidentified"' (Chalker 1996, p. 2).

While not supporting or defending any particular 'belief', this study, like Plowman's, champions the defence of the right to new and marginal beliefs – accepting that they may be *signs of truth*; while like Chalker I appreciate that strange phenomena can be researched, and that 'consensus reality' is possible even if unidentifiable or inexplicable.

## The UBI as a New Religious Movement

Research that assists in placing the Robinsons and the UBI Communities within the research of Intentional Communities and the ‘New Age’ ‘movement’ or ‘collective’, has helped demonstrate that the Robinsons’ movement was a religious movement which was in many ways ‘new’. Issues related to *Oahspe* and *Urantia* and their influence on the later UBI reveal more of the religious or spiritual orientation of the UBI, while three other studies: the only projects undertaken by qualified researchers with the knowledge and cooperation of the Robinsons, provide detail. The first of these was researched in 1963, during what has been already characterised as the *Inception phase of the New Age Community ideas and principles* (1962–1971); the second in 1980; and the third researched between 1979–1984, during what I characterise as a *Plateauing Phase of the UBI Community* (1979–1983).

Attention here is directed as much towards how these research projects were undertaken as to their content. These texts clearly establish that the Robinsons (even if unconsciously) laid the groundwork for a New Religious Movement. The Robinsons are seen not to be content with becoming a ‘loose’ part of a 1960s New Age *collective*; and not content to be small scale exemplars and participants in a Back-to-the-land *fad* or *craze*. It is important to examine this NRM *world* as it was, with an eye to where the Universal Brotherhood fitted within that world during its functioning and in its history. It also readies the research for a survey of how NRMs have interacted within the larger world; and how that world has responded to them as an inevitable ‘part’ of the world – yet ‘apart’ from it.

Lee Priestley’s *Shalam: Utopia on the Rio Grande 1881–1907* (1988, *Southwestern Studies Series*, no. 84, Texas Western Press, El Paso) outlines the history of the communal group inspired by the *Oahspe Book’s* Spiritualist author, John Ballou Newbrough. Fred Robinson knew about this ill-fated community experiment, but only vaguely mentioned it as having failed. Priestley’s remarkable piece of research explores the fruits of Newbrough’s desire to come ‘out of UZ’, the ‘world’s people’, and to follow the blue-print ‘anti-script’ laid down in *Oahspe*.



Newbrough and a wealthy *Faithist* (adherent), Andrew Howland, purchased a large parcel of land on the Rio Grande to which they felt spiritually led: ‘a place the world would not live, and yet I will make it a place of peace and plenty’ (*Oahspe* 1960, p. 831). They and other Faithists established a colony and advertised for ‘foundlings’, with no questions asked.<sup>50</sup> These children were then raised following the precise instructions of *Oahspe’s* ‘Book of Shalam’, to be spiritually-conscious vegetarians. Disaster upon disaster didn’t stop them. After Newbrough died, and notwithstanding some extraordinary feats of endurance by the now humbled Howland, the whole enterprise gradually fell apart, until the colony was dissolved in 1907. There was no paperwork regarding the identity of the orphans who had grown up with Howland and other Faithists. Only a few were subsequently able to trace blood relatives.

The full story reveals some important similarities and enthusiasms between the utopian ‘Shalam’ on the Rio Grande, and the Robinsons’ New Age Shalam – and its later incarnation as the Universal Brotherhood Community. Coming from the same root-stock: *Oahspe’s* ‘Book of Shalam’, this is not surprising – but the intersection of many *Oahspean* principles and practices with more contemporary 1970s New Age tendencies calls for more detailed analysis. Nor is the *Oahspe* tradition the only such sustained influence on the later UBI.

Martin Gardner’s *Urantia: The Great Cult Mystery* (1995, Prometheus Press, New York) explores how the other favourite Robinson text, *The Urantia Book* (1955) came to be written. Although Gardner’s work is controversial and unpopular with most present day readers for its prejudiced and unflattering conclusions, ‘insider’ researchers such as Larry Mullins, with Meredith Sprunger and fourteen long-time readers who ‘contributed, edited and signed off on our original History’ (2010, Foreword), admit that Gardner did get a lot of facts right:

Gardner is a good researcher of factual material such as dates. However, Gardner’s book is, in the author’s opinion, non-objective, inconsistent, relies upon mixed premises, and is bluntly prejudiced against the Revelation. Any religious belief could be

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<sup>50</sup> Newbrough even put out a monthly newsletter entitled *Castaways*, the first edition being November 1889. The publication sought ‘agents’ to assist in finding ‘foundlings, orphans, and other homeless and uncared for children, and homes for women’ <http://archives.nmsu.edu/exhibits/shalam2/Castaway.jpg>, accessed 25.3.2011).

attacked and ridiculed by means of the unfortunate techniques Mr. Gardner used to attack the Urantia Papers ... (Mullins 2010, p.104, endnote 5).

The variety of conflicting histories gives insights into the genesis of the Urantia Papers as they were first known – and of the genesis of the conflicts; particularly the part which William E. Sadler and his wife Lena Sadler played, in the processing of ‘messages’ from ‘the conduit’ to the finished publication.<sup>51</sup> Gardner’s conclusion is that a man named Wilfred Kellogg (a half-first-cousin of Lena Sadler) was the sleeping subject and authored the work from his subconscious mind, with William Sadler subsequently editing and authoring parts (Gardner 1995).<sup>52</sup> The whole history of how the book came to be written is now a matter of debate, with other self-published books such as Ernest P. Moyer’s *The Birth of a Divine Revelation: the Origin of the Urantia Papers* (2000) further exploring the territory. While the details and the theories about how it was written may be fascinating, Fred’s view was that ‘*it’s what’s in The Book that counts*’ – and this is the stance of most readers.

Gardner’s research includes a chapter on the history of *Oahspe*, noting similarities and differences between the two books, and some information supplied by Dan Massey one of his informants about

a group in Australia during the 1960s and ’70s that combined a belief in both the *Urantia Book* and *Oahspe*! It was led by a man named Fred Robinson who travelled about the continent wearing a robe with the three blue circles stencilled on the front.<sup>53</sup> The Foundation persuaded him to change the group’s name from Urantia Brotherhood to Universal Brotherhood, to discard the robe and play down *Oahspe*. After Robinson died according to Massey, the group became ‘less Urantian and more Oahspeish’. He does not know what happened to the followers (Gardner 1995, p. 178).

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<sup>51</sup> The Sadlers were both respected physicians. William Sadler was a debunker of paranormal claims. In his book *The Mind at Mischief* (1929) he explained the fraudulent methods of mediums and how self-deception leads to psychic claims. However, in the appendix he wrote that there were two cases that could not be explained to his satisfaction ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Urantia\\_Book](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Urantia_Book), accessed 7.3.2011).

<sup>52</sup> This view is contested by insider researchers: ‘A strange myth floated through the community of those who accepted *The Urantia Papers*. Many believed the Papers were channelled, and that Wilfred Custer Kellogg was the channeller. Nothing could be farther from the truth’ (Ernest Moyer 2005, [http://www.world-destiny.org/16\\_wilfred.html](http://www.world-destiny.org/16_wilfred.html), accessed 7.3.2011).

<sup>53</sup> Fred did on a few occasions wear a robe with the *Urantia Book*’s blue concentric circle trademark. This had been made for him by a creative alignee for weddings and special occasions. Having seen him wear this once, it is easy to understand how a story is expanded to suggest he wore the robe regularly.

Gardner's surprised exclamation mark indicates the seeming oddity of a fusion of *Oahspe* and *Urantia* – and the biographies produced in my own research accentuate the presence of a distinctively Australian direction in the typical syncretism of its NRMs. It will support Bouma's observation, drawn from studies of Australian statistics on religious affiliation, that in Australia:

Some individuals have begun to be involved in multiple religious groups, adopting beliefs and practices from a range of religions and spiritualities. The designers of Australian census presuppose that religious identities must be mutually exclusive (ABS 2005, in Bouma 2006, p. 63).

In the 1960s, *PIX* magazine undertook a series of investigative articles on religious beliefs and practices in Australia. Tess van Sommers' *Religions of Australia: The PIX Series extended to 41 Beliefs* (1964, Rigby Limited, Adelaide) included a Chapter on 'Shalam – The New Age' (pp. 205–209). While the content of this text is explored in Chapter 8 in the sub-section 'Australia's New Age Representatives', how this research was undertaken is significant here. Van Sommers explains in correspondence collected for this project:

I sent them (the Shalam Community) the standard long questionnaires I used with all my subjects, and followed up with further queries by mail. The Robinsons responded with longish letters and stacks of printed material, as I remember the latter. I sent them the draft of my article, which they approved without alteration. It went into the magazine [*PIX*], and the book, without further alteration (this is true of the whole series – there was no sub-editing whatsoever) (van Sommers, letter 11.11.2004).

In answer to a question I asked about how her unusual-for-the-time series of articles on Australian Religions in *PIX* magazine came about, van Sommers replied:

The series happened when I was asked by my editors to put up ideas for a long sequence of serious articles. The then new proprietors of the magazine may have disapproved of its frivolous character. Certainly, my series was in grotesque contrast to *PIX*'s normal role of purveyor of light entertainment and large pictures of semi-clad females.

Why I thought of religion, I do not know. It was half in jest. But once I started I became enthralled! I had taken my BA as an evening student; had read English Hons., Ancient History and Latin. Not a whiff of sociology. Now I was thunderstruck by the significance of religious beliefs to our society. Also I came to LOVE many of my subjects (mainly the sects) because of their innocence and harmlessness. Dear, dear people! ...

I cannot emphasise too strongly that the whole emphasis of the *PIX* work (no book was envisaged before the end of the Magazine series, only after its success) was from the

beginning, and by my decision alone, that it must be entirely descriptive and contain no critical element whatsoever. Little as I knew of the subject, and because of my ignorance, I would have considered it unseemly in the extreme to have commented upon what I recorded (ibid.).

What van Sommers achieved was a record of the movements of the day, in some detail, with primary, near ethnographic input from adherents – and, as she explained, without any form of judgment being made. Her work is both an indication of how far even popular media of the day were able to include ‘alternative’ cultural movements – a point elaborated in later analysis in the study – and how the tone varies from subsequent attempts to ‘reconstruct’ such social movements, as a form of oral history.

Other studies of the Australian impulse towards the spiritual exist. Nevill Drury and Gregory Tillett’s *Other Temples Other Gods: The Occult in Australia* (1980, Methuen, Sydney) explores Australia’s

extensive “occult heritage” embracing indigenous Aboriginal Dream-time beliefs, spiritualist churches, witchcraft, magic and goddess worship ... and also an increasingly prevalent mystical sub-culture which has allied itself generally to ecological and social awareness groups. Many occultists indeed speak of ‘consciousness raising’ as a key prerequisite of modern living ... (p. 7).

This book normalises the occult away from the media’s emplotment of it. The first paragraph refers to the way the popular imagination regarding the occult reached a climax during 1974 with the Anglican Church Enquiry into spirit possession, séances and Satanism that resulted from the screening of the Hollywood film *The Exorcist*.<sup>54</sup> Even in 1980 the authors were able to write ‘and still the feeling lingers on that the occult is somehow linked up to powers and principalities whose origin and purpose is manifestly evil’ (ibid.). As 1974 was also the period in which Fred Robinson was actively recruiting for the New Age Back-to-the land Shalam-Carranya Community, it is important to remember this cultural backdrop. While on the one hand debunking some of the ‘evil’ connotations associated with the term ‘occult’, Drury and Tillett tend to reify the media ‘cult’ emplotment through their depiction of the Robinsons and the

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<sup>54</sup> *The Exorcist* is a 1973 horror film directed by William Friedkin which deals with the demonic possession of a young girl and her mother’s desperate attempts to win back her daughter through an exorcism conducted by two priests ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Exorcist\\_\(film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exorcist_(film))), accessed 27.6.2011).

group which was evolving around them, revealing how difficult it is for writers – even those sympathetic to and connected within the domain’s network – to gather information about an emerging NRM without having lived within it or having an understanding of its evolution. It should be understood that the mid-to-late 1970s (when the data for *Other Temples* was being collected) the Shalam–Carranya Community had made both location and identity shifts, and had experienced a schism, making any research confusing, and operational information about the group a bit like quicksilver.<sup>55</sup>

With this background, Drury and Tillett’s version of the Robinsons and their group follows on from the Australian history of the nineteenth and twentieth-century esoteric occult movements such as Rosicrucianism, Spiritualism, Theosophy and Anthroposophy, most of which are esoteric teachings. Turning to the more recent occult history of Australia, Drury and Tillett introduce the more exoteric – even publicity seeking – ‘Robinsonian’ New Age teachings.

Yet Australia has become known as a centre for ‘New Age’ occult movements, unconcerned with remaining hidden and anxious to publicise their message. Most of these movements began in the era of the ‘flying saucers’, when sightings were first gaining publicity, and came about as an attempt to relate this phenomenon to religion, and a feeling that this world is not the best of all possible worlds. They merged a bit of science, a lot of science fiction, mysticism, elements of Theosophy and an alternative life-style to produce an approach that was counter-culturally occult. Probably the best known of these alternative communities is Shalam, founded by Fred Robinson, formally a Rosicrucian, and his wife Mary, formally a Scientologist. Robinson, usually described as ‘Australia’s oldest drop out’ at eighty-nine, began his ‘alternative’ career as a conscientious objector during World War I; he lost everything during the depression of the 1930s and began seeking a lifestyle outside the conventional social order (Drury & Tillett 1980, p. 32).

Having learnt that Fred had been connected with Rosicrucian teachings, but probably unaware of the specific activities of the Rosicrucian Order of the Aquarians (ROTA), the group Fred formally joined in 1937, Drury and Tillett skip straight to the movement as it was functioning at the time they wrote this book, using information at hand.

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<sup>55</sup> In speaking with the authors in conjunction with this project, I discovered that Gregory Tillett (as the researcher of this section) did make considerable efforts to find out how the group operated. He spoke with ‘one of Mary’s sons’, almost certainly Noel Broun, the owner of the Carranya property on which the Community experiment was situated. During this time the group was in hiatus. Noel and Mary had been through a difficult and public falling-out (albeit a short-lived one); the ‘Carranya Community’ had been vacated; ‘Shalam’ had been sold and a new property bought; followed by a publicly reported schism that gave rise to misinformation about the existing group. For these reasons Tillett’s data was not representative of either the Shalam or Carranya Community of the early 1970s, or the more religiously configured Universal Brotherhood to evolve. To Tillett, Fred’s ‘flying saucer’ and ‘vegetarian-purity’ foci were, quite understandably, seen as the main unifying themes and reference points of the group.

The movement he eventually established is known as the ‘Universal Brotherhood’, although popularly called ‘Shalam’, after the name of the original commune. Mr. Robinson is said to have the soul of a cosmic being from another planet, acting as a prophet and visionary for the Age of Aquarius. His philosophy derives, in part, from the ideas of the Findhorn community, *The Urantia Book*, *Oahspe*, various ideas from Theosophy, rigid ideals of physical purification, including fasting, strict vegetarianism, abstinence from all drugs (including tea and coffee), and the avoidance of sexual relations. Those who can achieve the required level of personal purity, usually whilst living in a ‘half-way’ commune, are permitted to reside at the principal ‘survival community’ of the movement in the countryside of Western Australia (Drury & Tillett 1980, p. 32–33).

While most of the information about Fred Robinson and the group’s philosophical sources in this account are accurate, when he comes to the beliefs, like almost all ‘outsider’ commentators (for the extenuating circumstances mentioned above) these sympathetic, *domain-insider* authors also reify the ‘cult’ stereotype. The idea that individuals within a political party have quite different perspectives while working for a greater ‘cause’ is somehow accepted, whereas members of a small NRM are seen to have unambiguous communal beliefs – something the Robinsons never wished on any individual who aligned with them. Drury and Tillett present a potted version of Fred’s most extreme flying-saucer-mediated prophecy and future role as the group’s beliefs:

The movement believes that the present social economic and political order will shortly collapse, and when that happens they will be among the few who survive ‘the holocaust of fire’ by which the earth is to be purified by the angels. The chosen will be liberated in flying saucers which will return them to earth when the purification is completed. A new civilisation, based on the ideals of the Universal Brotherhood can then be established. Those who are impure will have been removed from the earth to another planet (Drury & Tillett 1980, p. 33).

The authors’ explanation of the governance of the movement reveals the probability that ex-members (with anticult perspectives) were interviewed for the research. While unrepresentative of insider nuanced positioning, the authors do make the bald statement to encapsulate the general view of the way the group functioned: ‘The movement is controlled by a hierarchy of leaders, guided by Mary Robinson, who “channels” directions via dreams’ (ibid., p. 33). The idea that Shalam and Carranya could be construed as ‘various communes’ gives the impression of a larger organisation than it was, whereas it was simply that the one group was going through location changes: ‘Various communes are operated in Western Australia, all aiming at self-sufficiency’ (Drury & Tillett 1980, p. 33).

Turning now to the prophecy Fred was sharing with his audiences when I met him in 1971, Drury and Tillett complete the ‘cult’ emplotment of the UBI – but from within the occult world – thus confirming media depictions:

Mr. Robinson had declared – in 1971 – that there would be either an atomic war or worldwide tidal waves inaugurating the New Age in 1977–78, information obtained from the Space People. Austral-Aquaria (the real name for Australia) would be the continent for the new Aquarian Age. Whether the coming End has only been delayed remains to be seen; the Universal Brotherhood continues to prepare for its deliverance (ibid.).

The implication that the UBI was simply preparing for their own deliverance is a common outsider perspective/emplotment of a failed ‘doomsday cult’ group. While seeming to be true, this fails to explore the more subjective perspectives of those actually involved. The following text which completes this section on the Robinsons suggests there were other similar groups:

Other smaller and less publicised groups also exist throughout Australia in communes and farms pursuing an alternative life style; many of them maintain links with similar groups elsewhere in the world, whose titles range from Heralds of the New Age, The Summit Lighthouse and the White Star to the Bridge to Freedom, the Magnificent Consummation and the Mark-Age (ibid.).

The smaller groups were likely to have been those started by people with connections to the Theosophical Society, such as the Southern Centre of Theosophy, near Robe in South Australia. Nethania in Western Australia and Homeland in Northern New South Wales were others that were initially influenced by Fred Robinson but later made stronger connections with Findhorn. Other than these it is hard to know which groups Drury and Tillett are referring to; most ‘communes’ were back-to-the-land alternative life style groups having their genesis in a countercultural socio-political milieu rather than via the ‘occult’ connections listed here.

Patricia Black’s unpublished PhD thesis, *The Fashioning of the Earth Anew: An ethnography of the Universal Brotherhood, a religious utopian commune* (1984, University of Western Australia, Perth) is, as the only ethnographic study of the UBI, the most important and detailed contribution to research about the movement during its functioning. The first sentence of Black’s Abstract states that ‘The Universal Brotherhood is a chiliastic utopian commune situated on a 317 acre property in the

South West of Western Australia'. This is not an unfair description. Although no one in the Community (including the Robinsons) would have known the word 'chiliastic', the Robinsons were actively believers in a Christian cum 'New Age' version of chiliasm.<sup>56</sup> Certainly the word describes Fred's prophetic and religious positioning, and since the others in the Community had been drawn by him, it is worth examining how far the Community was based on his prophetic assumptions. Can then the UBI be assessed as an 'End-of-the-world' NRM – or as the press is wont to depict such groups: 'a Doomsday Cult'? This question will be addressed as the study evaluates the development of the Robinsons' movement and the formation of the UBI Community.

Black was not so much interested in the movement as a religious organisation, as in its 'utopian endeavours to build "model societies" free from the social problems that afflict the world' (Black 1984, p. 1). The focus of her research was therefore not on the historical backgrounds of the founders, nor on a cultural analysis of the movement, nor even on placing or understanding the group within the field of the NRMs of the period:

My interest in the Universal Brotherhood's utopian endeavour is centred upon the ways in which Members reconcile the interests of the individual with those of the group. How do they build a 'model society' in which there is room for individual autonomy while ensuring commitment to the community? In the idiom of the Brotherhood members, commitment to the community means 'Living in the Consciousness' (ibid., p. 1).

Black's ethnography reveals 'the Brotherhood members' dialectical resolution of this individual autonomy versus community authority issue' (ibid., p. 2). Black isolates different developmental stages of the UBI, and of the spiritual growth of members: 'Life in the Brotherhood is governed by creative and evaluative phases' (ibid., p. 2). While this study was focussed on the UBI's utopian endeavours, Black's theory can be applied to almost all organisations. Ethnographic studies done at one point, in one year, can reveal quite a different set of data in another year. Having said this, most past Members of the group would be unlikely to disagree with this view of developmental phases:

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<sup>56</sup> 'Chiliasm' is the Greek word corresponding to the Latin word 'millennium' meaning 'thousand years'. Some Christian groups highlight a belief in a Golden Age or Paradise on Earth when 'Christ will reign' prior to a final judgment and future eternal state (the 'World to Come' of the *New Heavens* and *New Earth*). This belief is derived primarily from the book of Revelations (20:1–10). Among some Christians who hold this belief, this is not the 'end of the world', but rather the penultimate age, the age just prior to the end of the world when the present heavens and earth will flee away (Rev. 21:1) (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Millennialism>, 24.2.2011).



The creative phase is characterised by heterogeneity, flexibility and inclusiveness, which enable the individual to assert his autonomy. The group's boundaries are relatively open and there is usually an inflow of newcomers. However, to deal with the threats to the Brotherhood reality that arise during this phase, the community leaders begin to demand ideological orthodoxy and homogeneity. These demands move the community into the evaluative phase which is characterised by conformity to the Consciousness and the exit of those residents unwilling to conform ...

So the dialectic continues. During the creative phase, the tenets of the vision are successfully implemented and individual autonomy characterises community life. During the evaluative phase, the tenets of the utopian vision are not implemented and conformity to the 'Consciousness' pervades community life (Black 1984, p. 2).

It is clear that all 24/7 live-in communities will often fail in achieving a 'dynamic balance between individual autonomy and group authority' (ibid., p. 1). However, underscoring the importance of this ideal – held as central to Black, she quotes Peter Cock:<sup>57</sup>

The balance between autonomy and community was central to understanding the dynamic struggle within alternative communities. Most members wanted a creative unity (Cock 1979, p. 293).

Black's developmental model, based on data gathered during participant-observation fieldwork with the group in 1980 during a number of visits, is insightful, presenting an interesting hypothesis in relation to the 'life-cycles' within NRMs. The approach is calculated: 'I evaluate the community's utopian endeavour primarily in terms of the psycho-social development of residents and the group' (Black 1984, Abstract), positioning her study of the group within what John Saliba (2003) calls a 'Psychological Definition' of NRMs (pp. 7–10):

... the psychological definition has focussed on the way the new religious movements recruit and maintain their membership and how they affect those who join them (Saliba 2003, p. 7).

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<sup>57</sup> Peter Cock had written *Alternative Australia: Communities of the Future* in 1979 (Quartet Books, Melbourne), a couple of years before Black began her research on the UBI. Thirty years later ABC's *George Negus Tonight* screened a story on the Community which Sandra and Peter Cock founded:

'Communal living – yes, it still happens. In the hills outside Melbourne is Moora Moora, said to be one of the oldest alternate [sic] communities in Australia. It was set up in the '70s and it's still going strong' (Negus 2003).

Cock's comments on the value of rules in an Intentional Community are useful:

We've evolved, over 30 years, a policy manual, which is that thick, and people arrive and join and go, 'My God! This is more bureaucratic than a bureaucracy!' The paradox of rules is if you know where you stand, you know what you can and can't do; it's a freedom. It's when you don't know that you really are at a loss (Cock, on *George Negus Tonight*, ABC, 11.9.2003,

<http://www.abc.net.au/gnt/future/Transcripts/s944138.htm>, accessed 24.3.2011).

So what are the primary and most useful ways of defining and placing the UBI and NRMs generally? How does society currently react to them? What other issues need to be broached before embarking on the story of the Robinsons and their fully-engaged young alignees of the 1970s? The way NRMs are defined and the typologies that have been created in an effort to understand NRMs within various disciplines, along with societal response to their existence, are all clearly important issues to canvas.

## **Chapter 4: Definitions, Typologies and Social Responses**

Much of the available research that discusses the world view of groups such as the Universal Brotherhood considers their communal formations under the heads of Intentional Communities and the 'New Age'. Having examined existing research on the Robinsons' Shalam and their communal artefact the Universal Brotherhood as an established New Religious Movement, it is now necessary to widen the scope, to explore how NRMs have been defined. The typologies that position them for ease of understanding; and the response of the society in which they are ultimately citizens – however much some may resist the fact – are necessary elements of this research, as it seeks to evaluate the socio-cultural contribution of the UBI. Further to these issues, the UBI needs to be placed within the context of the Australian religious culture. Is there a gap in the literature on Australian NRMs? How far does NRM scholarship globally address Australian NRMs – and is there evidence of anything distinctive in the Australian experience?

### **Definitions of NRMs**

The word 'cult', so often used to refer to a new religious group, has so many meanings and contains so much emotional content that it 'might have lost one of the major functions of linguistic designation, that is, to convey accurate and useful information' (Saliba 2003, p. 1). The negative significance attached to the word 'cult' means it is often preferred to more neutral alternative terms such as 'new religious movement', 'emergent religion' or 'contemporary religion'. This is especially the case with traditional religionists (particularly Evangelical Christians), but also with psychiatrists, lawyers, and news media reporters (Saliba 2003, p. 1).

The term 'New Religious Movement' is now used by most scholars who study such groups because 'cult' has become a pejorative in the media and among anticultists (those who align themselves against groups they label as dangerous and evil) (Daschke & Ashcraft & Ashcraft 2006, p. 1).

The term New Religious Movement (or NRM) has emerged as the most popular descriptor of 'those religious groups that differ significantly from those religious groups

that are regarded as the normative expression of religion in our total culture' (Braden 1951, Preface).<sup>58</sup>

Daschke and Ashcraft (2006), having also rejected the term 'cult' for the more neutral NRM, point to problematic issues surrounding the term New Religious Movement, which has come to denote 'any and all alternative and emergent religious groups' (Daschke & Ashcraft 2006, p. 3). The questions which Daschke and Ashcraft raise are helpful in unearthing anomalies and difficulties associated with *any* label for so diverse a socio-religious territory.

*Are all these groups new?*

Many base their identities and build appeal through their supposed antiquity (Theosophy and Rosicrucianism being examples). No consensus exists amongst scholars about what constitutes 'newness'. Claimants include movements which began as recently as the 1960s and 1970s, from both the East and West; groups which now have a significant history themselves (Daschke & Ashcraft 2006, p. 3).

*Are these groups religious?*

Many of the groups reject the label of 'religion' and claim that members are not 'religious'. It is important to remember that in the mid-to-late twentieth-century 'NRM discourse often contained a strong component of religious denial or downplaying religious elements' (ibid.).

*Are these groups movements ?*

NRM scholars point to a movement's social fluidity within the larger society, while most NRMs have a degree of organisation, with structures, membership rules, and a leadership hierarchy (see Daschke & Ashcraft 2006, p. 4; Chryssides 1999, pp. 16–17).

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<sup>58</sup> The late Walter Ralston Martin (1928–1989) began his seminal work *The Kingdom of Cults* (1968) with Charles Braden's broad definition of a NRM ('cult'), however Martin quickly adds the more specific rider: 'a cult might also be defined as a group of people gathered about a specific person or person's misrepresentation of the Bible' (Martin 1968, p. 11).

Daschke and Ashcraft, in *New Religious Movements: A Documentary Reader* (2006)<sup>59</sup> sum up the imperfections and yet the value of the NRM descriptor:

NRMs, then, are new (or old) religious groups that may or may not claim to be religious, and are organisations more often than they are movements. Although an imperfect label, 'NRM' continues to be the most helpful one available, and has achieved a level of acceptance in general discourse about religion that other labels have not. Conceived by mid twentieth century observers of American and, more broadly, Western religious events, the category of NRM is useful because it includes both the innovative newer religious groups and the older Alternative groups, which, taken together, form a spectrum challenging both mainstream religious traditions and secular society (Daschke & Ashcraft 2006, p. 4).

Having said this, John Saliba's *Understanding New Religious Movements* (2003)<sup>60</sup> discusses three definitions of 'cults'/NRMs that typify the three main ways they have been researched and discussed. Each examines the dominant definitions of what new religious movements are to 'outsider' theologians, psychologists, and sociologists. I have followed Saliba's argument closely (pp. 1–10); and then added an unlikely, but perhaps useful contribution, derived from 'insider' literature, which explores a spiritual/religious definition of a cult/NRM.

## 1) Saliba's Theological Definitions

Theological definitions of NRMs focus on the theological meaning of the word 'cult' – as in the works of Christian evangelical authors who are dedicated to refutation of sects and cults. Martin's definition of a cult is useful here: 'a group, religious in nature, which surrounds a leader or a group of teachings which either denies or misrepresents essential

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<sup>59</sup> This unusual 'reader' is designed to be a 'useful, reliable, and handy one-volume source of information about various NRMs as found in documents from the movements themselves' (Daschke & Ashcraft, 2006, ix). Cooperation and collaboration with those directly involved with the NRMs was seen as critical. To decide where to include groups in the reader and which documents might be used the editors asked advice of scholars with expertise on specific NRMs. The way this book was put together thus says something about the methodology for this study: 'Participative Inquiry'.

<sup>60</sup> Saliba's text is regarded as a classic introduction to the subject of NRMs. It is a sociologically oriented overview of this contentious religious territory. Saliba provides sound advice for those thinking of joining an NRM, and those who have recently left one and are embittered by the experience. From my own *once-insider* perspective, I believe Saliba confers a balanced overview of the subject. If there was one book that most influenced this study as most succinctly and fairly depicting the territory of NRMs, it would be Saliba's *Understanding New Religious Movements* (2003 2<sup>nd</sup> edn [1995]). Saliba is professor of religious studies at University of Detroit Mercy; he teaches comparative religion, while most of his published work deals with NRMs: *Psychiatry and Cults: An Annotated Bibliography* (1987); *Sociology and Cults: An Annotated Bibliography* (1990); *Perspectives on New Religious Movements* (1995); and *Christian Responses to the New Age Movement* (1999). Saliba is a Roman Catholic priest and a member of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits).

Biblical doctrine' (Martin 1980, p. 16; see also Sire 1980, p. 20). These types of Christian analysis have the appeal of being 'simple, direct and intelligible to the average person committed to a traditional Christian church' (Saliba 2003, p. 4), but they lump NRMs together as 'unorthodox' or 'heretical' groups, and do not elicit a 'proper theological response' (Saliba 2003, p. 5). Saliba points out that this definition 'leaves unsolved the question of Christian orthodoxy' (ibid.) thus bypassing age-old debates which have split the Christian Church, while the definition also 'fails to acknowledge the variety of beliefs and practices that one encounters among the new religions themselves' (ibid.).

Saliba also observes that 'calling cults unorthodox does not help us understand them' (ibid.); nor does it address itself to questions of religious pluralism in society (ibid., pp. 5–6; see also Coward 2000; and Griffiths 2001). As a result of such 'cult'-defining texts (and there is a plethora of them in Christian Bookshops) the discourse of marginalisation tends to dominate popular views on NRMs. This dominance of 'cult' discourse within the mainstream (most powerfully led by Christians) effectively thwarts any pluralist-peacemaking gestures from NRMs towards that mainstream – notwithstanding such socially-positive acts as the emergency response and humanitarian aid given by the some NRMs – almost always cynically perceived as 'a marketing ploy'.<sup>61</sup>

The theological definition of NRMs helped to define the Robinsonian pre-history of the UBI – just as it did during the group's functioning. Out of his own mouth Fred often effectively defined himself and movements he was part of or initiated as extraordinarily unorthodox, if not supremely and outrageously heretical. But then Fred revelled in his own unorthodoxy – he almost wanted to be rejected. As we shall see, Mary Broun (née O'Dwyer, later Robinson) was also unafraid of being different and unorthodox in her ideas and her beliefs. However, unlike Fred Robinson, Mary Broun was a model of moral Christian behaviour, having very orthodox values and always encouraging UBI Members to raise rather than lower the bar of community standards. The UBI Community both lived, and was careful to be seen to live by, standards which were

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<sup>61</sup> See for instance a video clip about Scientology's 'Volunteer Ministries' which records interviews with emergency workers recorded soon after the 9/11 Twin Towers collapse (<http://www.volunteerministers.org/#/tent/nav-disaster>, accessed 15.3.2011).

highly ethical and scrupulously principled by any standard. Mary also encouraged the UBI members to refrain from antagonising those who were assessed as being unable to appreciate the group's positions. While Fred set out to stir the theological the pot, Mary *let sleeping dogmas lie*, going out of her way to find common ground with other Christians. The Community tended to follow Mary's conciliatory lead, and so had excellent relationships with Catholics and the less strident Protestant churches.

Saliba suggests that the presence of NRMs in our culture could have positive consequences, in that they may 'indirectly urge believers of different traditions to foster a deeper understanding of their respective faiths and to strive for a clearer exposition and defence of their beliefs and practices' (2003, p. 6). Saliba also notes

... the urgent need for a more thorough assessment not only of what new religions teach, but also of the many factors that contribute to their rise and success. Only then can a theological appraisal be safely made (ibid., pp. 6–7).

This study aims to make some headway in this territory by exploring the Robinsons' schema and the factors that contributed to the UBI's rise and fall. Such case-studies, employing 'insider knowledge', can provide data for a genuinely informed theological appraisal of an NRM.

## **2) Saliba's Psychological Definitions**

As already mentioned, psychological definition focuses on the way NRMs recruit, (re)orient and keep members in a group. Saliba points to two very different psychological takes on the way NRMs affect their members:

The first, and more prevalent, definition is that cults are dangerous institutions that cause severe mental and emotional harm to those who commit themselves to their creeds and lifestyles (Saliba 2003, p. 7).

This negative view of the NRM domain focuses on the 'controlling cult' stereotype, rather than the 'heretical cult' depiction of the theological definition. Here, movements are depicted as spurious, and controlled by a 'cult leader' who dominates innocent and abused 'cult followers', and as Philip Cushman describes it,

... demands unquestionable loyalty and complete obedience to its restrictive ideas, rules and totalistic methods; uses methods of mind control; uses deception and deceit when recruiting and interacting with the outside world; systematically exploits the member's

labour and finances; attacks or abandons members who disagree with or leave the group (Cushman 1984, p. 6).

No matter what the facts of a given case may be – and each experience is likely to be quite different, both within a given group and between the range of groups – this psychological stereotype is played out in the public domain, reifying and extending an already endemic public perception. This view has been promoted through some of the psychological literature, which has in turn given ammunition to the press: ‘This negative view of a cult that stresses manipulation, mind control, and deception as the constitutive elements of a cult has persisted in psychological literature’ (Saliba 2003, p. 7; see also Abgrall 2000). Psychologists contend that their experiences in counselling ex-members confirm that ‘their intellectual and emotional lives have been literally impaired by the teachings and lifestyles of the new religions’ (Saliba 2003, p. 8), further implying that membership of a new religion is not a free act (*ibid.*). The Christian theological definition is thus supported by the psychological definition, and is used as a weapon of war against the ‘evil controlling cults’, even utilising its own discourse as ‘evidence’ in many court cases ‘in attempts to justify legal actions against new religions’ (*ibid.*; see also Brady 1999, pp. 81–100).

Saliba points out that while ‘the appeal of this definition has been phenomenal’ (2003, p. 8), the approach has encountered much opposition from sociologists, and from some psychologists and psychiatrists who have actually tested many cult members and examined their family and social backgrounds (*ibid.*). This second psychological viewpoint sees NRMs as ‘helpful organisations that provide an alternative therapy to many young adults as they are faced with the momentous decisions at important junctures of their lives’ (Saliba 2003, p. 9). Marc Galanter in his studies of charismatic religious sects and zealous self-help groups even suggests that involvement in some new religions might be helpful in certain cases – as ‘adjuncts’ to psychiatric care (1982, p. 1539; 1990, p. 550). While this position is rarely accepted outside professional circles it has, as Saliba points out, certain advantages:

It explains why many converts appear to be relatively healthy and content, even though their lifestyles are out of the ordinary. Further, it directs attention to those problems that young adults face before they ever thought of joining a marginal religious group. And finally, it leaves open the possibility that involvement in a new religion might have diverse effects on different people and that, consequently, negative generalisations on the individual psychological states of members are unwarranted (Saliba 2003, p. 9).



Although it may be true that in some cases new religions are ‘dangerous detours’ in the process of growing up (Levine 1984; 1986), they can also be a rite of passage, a place where growing up happens, and a place where people move beyond adolescent selfishness and self-destructive behaviours. Certainly Fred and Mary Robinson saw the UBI as a place which could help people to give up addictions to drugs and alcohol, and to make a lasting connection with a better and more responsible part of themselves. Whether they stayed or not was no concern of the Robinsons – although it sometimes was to me and other members who were more emotionally invested in friendships and youthful idealism. The movement was peopled by individuals who wanted to engage in a service to mankind, and also by those who were dysfunctional – disaffected youth – who over time became responsible members of an ethical organisation, living an environmentally aware and healthy lifestyle, in turn providing a service to newcomers, the membership, and to the children of the Community – ‘*for the Children*’ was always Fred’s (*Oahspean*) first reason for the establishment of the Community, along with the ideal/goal of providing a model for the greater society to emulate. In most ways, as concerns the Universal Brotherhood, psychiatric definitions which would characterise it as a ‘dangerous mind-controlling-cult’ are unwarranted. As Saliba comments:

Psychiatric definitions of a cult are, as a rule, wanting because they take only one narrow viewpoint of religious involvement, namely that of individual psychology. They consequently tend to neglect both the obvious social aspects and the spiritual dimensions of involvement in a new religious movement. They fail to relate the presence of such movements to contemporary sociocultural development and religious change ... (Saliba 2003, p. 10).

While the psychological definitional perspective has come, post-Jonestown, to colour the vast majority of popular media representations of NRMs, it offers little to an empirical or investigative project of research – unless it be into why, and how, social understandings of NRMs achieve formation. While such analysis is undertaken in this study of the evolution of the Shalam Community (pre-UBI functioning), most popular media uses of psychological/cult definition remain ‘interested’ or judgmental accounts, without the capacity to offer full explanation of a movement. For this study, a broader social form of inquiry is needed.

### 3) Saliba's Sociological Definitions

Sociologically it is almost impossible to 'define' New Religious Movements, for sociology acknowledges the complexity of the subject:

Unlike the theological and psychological writings on new religious movements, sociological literature provides us with such a variety of reflections that it is practically impossible to come up with a short, clear-cut, universally acceptable definition (Saliba 2003, p. 10).<sup>62</sup>

Sociological literature on religious institutions considers many categories, from church and denomination, to sect, and then cult.

The way these disparate organisations are related both to one another and to society at large, their evolution over the course of time, and the factors that influence their development have been the subject of debate among sociologists well before the debate over new religions (Saliba 2003, p. 10).

An examination of the term 'cult' away from its theological, psychological, and populist press-mediated pejorative connotations, reveals a more cautious set of meanings that places the word within the religious domain. Rutgers University professor Benjamin Zablocki outlines differences between cults and churches, and sects and denominations.<sup>63</sup> He sees 'cults' as innovative, fervent groups usually started by charismatic personalities. If they become accepted into the mainstream, then they lose their fervour. As they become more organised and integrated into the larger community, they then become 'churches'; but when people within churches become dissatisfied and break off into fervent splinter groups, the new groups are called not 'cults', but 'sects'. As sects in turn become more stolid and integrated into the community, they become 'denominations' (Zablocki, 1997; see also Bainbridge & Stark 1996, for a full discussion on the subject of cults, churches, sects and denominations).

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<sup>62</sup> For a full discussion of the sociology of new religious movements see Robbins 1988; and Dawson 1998.

<sup>63</sup> Benjamin Zablocki and Thomas Robbins (eds.) in their 2001 book *Misunderstanding Cults: Searching for Objectivity in a Controversial Field*, make an important contribution to the NRM domain of study. Their text is amongst the few publications which have been able to address partisan perspectives – for it draws together disparate elements (it includes contributions from ten religious, sociological and psychological scholars) in Plain English for popular consumption. It discusses topics such as 'brainwashing', violence in NRMs, the conflict that exists between NRMs and their critics, as well as the ramifications of raising children in controversial religious movements ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Misunderstanding\\_Cults\\_\(book\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Misunderstanding_Cults_(book)), accessed 15.3.2011).

Such definitions of religious organisations become helpful when defining where groups such as the Universal Brotherhood fit within the typologies that scholars have created. Interestingly, Zablocki's definition positions cults as the most innovative kinds of religious organisation, for a cult has not come directly out of a church, sect or denomination. It is from the outset a new compound, likely to be eclectic in its selection of beliefs, values and practices, but original in its assemblage of a set of core principles. In this understanding of the term, the Universal Brotherhood can claim to be – perhaps almost proudly – a cult. However, through media (mis)use pejorative connotations attached to the word 'cult' have overpowered all other meanings of the word. This study uses 'cult' only in referring to the word itself.<sup>64</sup>

Within the literature of sociology however, the overlapping terms 'sect' and 'cult' evince no socio-linguistic 'baggage'. So we see that sociologically 'the words "church" and "denomination" refer to mainline religious organisations, while "sect" and "cult" are applied to those relatively small groups that are sociologically marginal and deviant'<sup>65</sup> (Saliba 2003, p. 10).

It is regrettable that the sociological definitions of NRMs are the least popular definitional mode. This study reveals just how, without a sociological study of the Robinsons and the UBI, only the theological, psychological and media emplotted stereotypical depictions remain. This study suggests how such studies might be addressed in the future – for the benefit of the little worlds of NRMs. Saliba explains the seeming failure of sociological definitions of NRMs to find purchase on the popular mind:

This is probably because sociologists make no judgements on the truth or falsehood of the cult's beliefs (as in the theological approach) or on the good or bad effects of cult involvement on individual members (as in the psychological approach). Besides, many sociological studies of specific cults do not support the prevalent contentions that the

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<sup>64</sup> When I first began reading the sociological literature I freely used the term 'cult' to describe the Universal Brotherhood. The ex-member/participants of the UBI who had mostly appreciated their time in the group, felt my use of the term 'cult' was an affront – an unfair and demeaning descriptor. On the other hand, those ex-members who did not mostly appreciate their time at the UBI felt that my use of the term vindicated their own positioning. Both had misread my meaning. I soon discovered that there is so much stereotyped emotional baggage attached to this term that it was best to avoid the word altogether.

<sup>65</sup> Sociologically speaking the word 'deviant' is not a judgmental pejorative, but used to designate deviation from an accepted norm.

new religions are evil institutions that are recruiting new members by deceitful means and maintaining them by forceful indoctrination programs. Nor do they subscribe to the view that cult members become psychologically weak and intellectually inferior people dominated by tyrannical leaders.

Even if one disagrees with the nonjudgmental approach of sociologists, one has to admit that they have provided the most complete descriptions of many of the new lifestyles as well as penetrating insights into the phenomenon of new religions as a whole (Saliba 2003, p. 11).

Sociological studies of NRMs thus supply reliable data that can assist in evolving a religious/spiritual definition of NRMs, and so help represent inner-experiential impulses from within the world of New Religious Movements. They help explain culturally innovative, marginal worlds on their own terms.

#### **4) A Spiritual/Religious Definition**

This study then proposes another definition of NRMs, outside the theological, psychological or sociological definitions already canvassed. Such a definition caters to the spiritual/religious impulses that form the groups themselves – generic impulses which support religious pluralism. Such an approach is cognisant of the psychological dangers of a group's 'apartness', while focussing on the psychological benefits of its 'togetherness'; and recognises the social challenges of the 24/7 'hot-housing' of members within a communal 'family'.

The *Urantia Book* (1955), Fred Robinson's main philosophical reference work, makes a contribution to such a definition of cults – while offering some advice to both mainstream stakeholders and NRMs. As this study is designed as a 'participatory inquiry' (Herron 1971; Reason 1990) it is appropriate to turn to the 'insider' literature for ideas which might lead to co-joint 'insider/outsider' definitions and understandings.

While having employed 'outsider' texts to gain insight into the positioning of a movement that is mainly an 'insider' concern, it is clear that an eclectic interface between subjective, self-reflective, insider – or 'emic' – sources; and the more objective and analytically-assessed, outsider – or 'etic' – sources builds a complementary system

for analysis.<sup>66</sup> The project of comprehending just what a *cultic organisation* (using the sociologic definition) like the Universal Brotherhood contributes to both its own members and society at large – both in the time of their functioning and into the future – needs to include both approaches.

... an appropriate academic agenda for an intercultural, polycentric world is to obtain and ‘broker’ *both* kinds of knowledge – emic and etic, ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’. This strategy is particularly applicable to the task of reconstructing the subjectivities of religious discourses on the one hand, and locating these in historical and cultural context on the other (Sutcliffe 2003, p. 16).

*The Urantia Book* (1955) in its concluding remarks in ‘Paper 87: The Ghost Cults’ (pp. 965–966) itself has something to say about the history and religious significance of cults on this planet. The text is couched in its trademark non-human author’s ‘God’s eye’ rhetoric, sharing with the reader what Fred Robinson called *the cosmic viewpoint*:

Every inspiring ideal grasps for some perpetuating symbolism – seeks some technique for cultural manifestation which will insure survival and augment realisation – and the cult achieves this end by fostering and gratifying emotion (p. 965; and in on-line text, <http://urantiabook.org/newbook/papers/p087.htm>, accessed 15.3.2011).

The above ‘truth’ links emotional appeal into the formation of new religions. Inspiring ideals are seen to ‘grasp’ or *take-hold-of-the-moment* to seek cultural perpetuity. Implicit is the need for a charismatic, inspirational speaker/leader who engages their audiences, encouraging emotionally empowering responses that lead to action. Fred Robinson’s Back-to-the-land countercultural New Age alternative society was such a symbol, and he had a ‘nothing-to-lose’ audience, with enough *persuadees* who became *alignees*, prepared to make monumental lifestyle-changes to see his theories become action – praxis – in their own lives.

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<sup>66</sup> Sutcliffe (2003, pp. 15–17) employed the terminology ‘emic’ and ‘etic’ in his analysis of the ‘New Age’. These terms were first employed by the 1950s linguist Kenneth Pike, who dropped the prefix from the conceptual pair ‘phonemic/phonetic’ to develop a higher order terminology that could apply to culture in general (Headland 1990, p. 15). Thus the term ‘emic’ relates to relevant *insider* systems, meanings and behaviours, while ‘etic’ relates to *outsider* systems formulated to scan and decode unfamiliar ‘emic’ systems (Pike 1990, p. 28; in Sutcliffe 2003, p. 15). This study then takes the position that the final product ‘should reflect the kind of biculturalism in which the ethnographer understands cultural phenomena in both emic (native) and etic (outsider) ways’ (Wagner 1997, p. 90).

When a ‘revelation of truth’ is presented to *persuadees* within a loose ‘collective’ of already engaged ‘Seekers’ (as Fred Robinson did to his 1970s audiences);<sup>67</sup> then the opportunity of becoming *alignees* (a descriptor with more ‘agency’ than the word ‘follower’) is presented to that audience. Those who coalesce around this (re)statement of ‘truth’ – usually represented by a teacher/guru and/or a sacred text – are desirous of finding living-symbolism through life-changing action. At this point a ‘movement’ has begun. At this moment of initial mobilisation, there is however usually little or no organisation. Soon the need for order becomes apparent, however loose the group might wish to be. Once a chain of responsibility/command is established, along with agreements/rules, and a roster system/commitment to work, we have an organisation – *let the cultic games begin.*

The *Urantia Book* text explored below draws attention to the fact that a cult would be the outcome of its own restatement of the Teachings of Jesus to present day *Urantians* (the people of this planet):

Regardless of the drawbacks and handicaps, every new revelation of truth has given rise to a new cult, and even the restatement of the religion of Jesus must develop a new and appropriate symbolism (Presented by Brilliant Evening Star of Nebadon, pp. 965-966).<sup>68</sup>

More of this *Urantia Book* text will be explored in subsequent phases of this research. With the help of the data, collected through the full study, a ‘spiritual/religious’ definition of New Religious Movements will be attempted – in contradistinction to ‘Biblically correct’ process of a theological definition of a NRM. In the meantime, further classification of NRMs can be undertaken, shedding light on the many responses to the Australian evolution of the UBI.

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<sup>67</sup> At the time of the Nimbin Aquarius Festival (1973) where Fred Robinson gained a substantial number of ‘recruits’, the New Age was a ‘collectivity’ rather than a ‘movement’. As an emblem New Age had been enjoying ‘an episodic career as “fad” within a diffuse collectivity of seekers in the 1950s and 1960s but dissolved into a loose ‘idiom’ after the 1970s’ (Sutcliffe 2003, p. 209).

<sup>68</sup> The ‘Papers’ in *The Urantia Book* are purportedly ‘presented’ by cosmic personalities. ‘Nebadon’, as it is explained in *The Urantia Book*, is our ‘local universe’. ‘The Bright and Evening Stars’ are described as ‘superangels’ – the Nebadon Corps of these beings were said to be numbered at 13,641 at the time of writing (1955, ‘Personalities of the Local Universe’, in Bright & Evening Stars, *The Urantia Book*, Paper no. 37, p. 407). While the cosmology and names were strange when initially encountered, like algebra, when one gets to know the code it does appear as an uncommon kind of sense – as much as any other extra-terrestrially received conception. A cursory look is baffling; only a dedicated study with ‘*the open mind of a little child*’ can enter into this complex *Urantian Universal Worldview*.

## Typologies of New Religious Movements

There are many typologies of NRMs. While some of these categorisations create a structure under which The UBI and NRMs generally could be studied, this research adopts the typology introduced by Derek Daschke and W. Michael Ashcraft's *New Religious Movements: A Documentary Reader* (2005). The authors section their reader into 5 Parts – 'understandings', 'selves', 'families', 'societies', and 'worlds' – to look at NRMs through a set of lenses configured as 'new'. It is perhaps useful to imagine each lens as providing a transparency of a different hue; when overlaid, each upon the other, a specific capturing of information takes place – the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. Each 'Part' in this typology says something about the nature of NRMs. Most groups could fit into a few of the categories, as they clearly overlap – but each will have a different combination of qualities and characteristics arrayed around the most defining aspect of the group.

The ideas behind each filter will be described briefly here. Through the various phases of the study the Universal Brotherhood will be examined through the overlaid set of transparencies. The overarching question seeks to locate where the UBI fits in this typology of 'newness'.

These five categories reflect themes of newness typically found in NRMs (and traditional religions for that matter). A particular NRM will emphasise one or more of these themes in communication with members and the larger world, including and especially any texts it holds sacred. For our purpose here, we might call these themes a 'nexus of novelty' that offers something appealing and compelling around which an identity can be constructed in contradistinction to other socially available options, both for the group as a whole and for individual members (Daschke & Ashcraft 2005, p. 11).<sup>69</sup>

As we briefly examine some of these defining qualities of groups around their 'novelties' a multilayered picture of NRMs emerges.

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<sup>69</sup> A similar idea exists in marketing: a USP ('unique selling point' or 'unique selling proposition') is that which defines a product or service: The concept was first proposed as a theory to explain a pattern among successful advertising campaigns of the early 1940s. Today the term is used in other fields or just casually to refer to any aspect of an object that differentiates it from similar objects. A number of businesses currently use USPs as a basis for their marketing campaigns ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unique\\_selling\\_proposition](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unique_selling_proposition), accessed 15.3.2011).

## **Daschke & Ashcraft Part 1: New Understanding**

Groups emphasising a new understanding primarily address ‘the illusions and errors that plague people’s experience of life ... and our constant confrontations with difference, disharmony and separations’ (Daschke 2005, p. 11). Beyond this world, so this kind of group assures its members, is an ‘infinite, interconnected spiritual realm’ (ibid.). Accessible to all, if only they could have their spiritual eyes and ears opened, is a ‘completely transformed understanding of the nature of the cosmos, how it works, and the human individual’s role in it’ (ibid.). The groups seen by Daschke and Ashcraft as typifying this nexus of novelty include Christian Science, Theosophy, and UFO religious groups.

## **Daschke & Ashcraft Part 2: New Self**

A group that promotes a new self as its primary feature sees ‘a potential for unlimited spiritual growth as inherent to all humans’ (ibid.). Unlocking this human/divine potential and transforming the apparently weak into the inherently strong is the *raison d’être* of groups which are seen to provide a ‘new self’ focus. Powerful and vital superhuman forces are seen as the individual’s right and destiny: ‘New self groups often speak of the godliness of all the individuals and the possibility of becoming a god or godlike oneself’ (ibid., pp. 11–12). Examples given to typify the New Self are Wiccan Beliefs and Soka Gakkai Buddhism.<sup>70</sup>

## **Daschke & Ashcraft Part 3: New Family**

Groups which constitute themselves as ‘new families’ reproduce the rhetoric and structure of the nuclear family to explicitly code the relationship of the leader to that of a “parent”. Followers then become “children”, seeking guidance from their “elders”. Daschke & Ashcraft comment that ‘it is the New Family groups that inspire the ire and fear of parents, religious leaders and politicians’ (ibid., p. 12). Embracing a new family is tantamount to rejecting the old one; and such rejection ‘applies to society’s surrogate families, religion and the state, where leaders are more or less regarded as parental

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<sup>70</sup> Sōka Gakkai (literally, ‘Value-Creation Society’) is a lay religious movement within Nichiren Buddhism, a branch of Mahayana Buddhism derived from the teachings of the thirteenth-century Japanese monk, Nichiren Daishonin. There are more than 12 million members of Sōka Gakkai International in 192 countries and territories ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%C5%8Dka\\_Gakkai](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%C5%8Dka_Gakkai), accessed 8.3.2011).



figures' (ibid.). The threat seems strongest when groups seem to 'replace those traditional structures *at their very core* through redefining the family ...' (ibid.). Two groups chosen in Daschke and Ashcraft's study to represent the New Family nexus of novelty are the Unification Church, and The Family/The Children of God.

### **Daschke & Ashcraft Part 4: New Society**

While New Family groups tend to insulate themselves from the world they reject, some NRMs seek to promote new moral and social justice imperatives to reform the world, 'thus working to transform the existing institutions and mores into ones that achieve a unified higher purpose while improving the daily lives of the needy and deserving within the social sphere' (Daschke & Ashcraft 2005, p. 12). New Society NRMs are seen here firstly as exemplars to society as a whole (even globally); often as 'the catalyst that will ultimately create a permanent perfect society' (ibid.). Social relations and scrupulous ethics are held by most of these groups to extraordinarily high – even divine – standards; 'moral failings could jeopardise nothing less than the promise of a hard-won paradise on earth' (ibid., p. 13). Examples given of New Societies are The Rastafarians; The Nation of Islam; and The People's Temple.

### **Daschke & Ashcraft Part 5: New World**

A New World group's particular novelty (in the West at least) revolves around the Book of Revelation, or the Apocalypse of St. John. An envisioned 'new heaven and new earth' (Rev. 21:1) is anticipated at the 'End of Time'; but prior to this fortuitous outcome is a final battle between (the) Good (forces) and (the) Evil (forces) – Armageddon. There are some NRMs not linked with Christian ideology which see

the only hope for the future in the promise of a new earth, either through a complete revitalisation of the planet as a living being itself (Gaia) or through casting off this planet for a more perfect place in the cosmos ... (Daschke & Ashcraft 2005, p. 13)

The latter usually involves expected intervention by superior intelligences/beings beyond this world. Examples of New World NRMs include The Adventist Tradition; Jehovah's Witnesses; and The New Millennial NRMs.

## **A Matrix of Multifarious Connections**

As already footnoted, the primary material supplied by the movements themselves provides the data for Daschke and Ashcraft's study. This preserves the perspective of the participating NRMs, yet also allows analysis of the many influences and interconnections operating within NRMs. As the authors point out, 'each nexus of novelty in this schema is progressively more comprehensive, there is often an implicit or explicit transformation of the categories that precede it' (Daschke & Ashcraft 2005, p. 13). The continuum – from *understanding* → *self* → *family* → *society* → *world*, need not be seen as linear, but could also be understood as circular or as a matrix:

(U)ltimately, the best way to conceptualise the relationships among these five types is a *matrix*: to achieve the fullest comprehension and analysis, any given NRM can be viewed primarily through the lens of one of these categories, but then the diligent investigator must trace the multifarious connections between one nexus of novelty and any others that might be pertinent (*ibid.*, pp. 13–14).

An indication of the complexity of this matrix will be broached later in this study, where, employing Daschke and Ashcraft's typological heads, the Universal Brotherhood's nexus of novelty will be conceptualised within the matrix of its multifarious manifestation and connections.

A further complication – one not mentioned by Daschke and Ashcraft – is that what a group might see as its nexus of novelty (how it constructs itself) might be quite different to that which the press, or a researcher, or society at large, sees as the stand-out characteristic. To this extent, the specifics of the Australian context become important in any evaluation of the Universal Brotherhood as a NRM.

## **The UBI and Australian Religion**

Gary Bouma (2006) observes that while Australian religion and spirituality are largely an amalgam of imported streams and strands, these are constructed and reproduced in a peculiarly Australian manner. If 'there is a distinctive quality to Australian religion and spirituality' (Bouma 2006, p. 31), then it is important to examine the genesis of one of the few home-grown Australian NRMs (sociologically defined as a cult rather than a sect), exploring the influences that formed it prior to the media representations of the 1970s which shaped the public's perception of it at that time; or via the retrospective

ABC *Compass* documentary ‘The Brotherhood’ (Critchley 2009), which promises to reshape perceptions for another generation.

The biographies produced for this research incorporate a developmental trace of the protagonists’ religious enthusiasms. To that extent they contribute to the concepts isolated within the research of Breward (1993), Carey (1996), Piggin (1996), Tacey (1995; 2000; 2003) and Bouma (2006), all of which focus on the ‘resurgence of interest in the role of religious groups, organisations and beliefs in the emergence of the nation’ (Bouma 2006, p. 31). Religion, including the innovative NRMs, has helped shape this country. Research into religious movements, organisations and collectives within an Australian context – especially when written by insiders – adds weight to cultural understanding in that it can (through excavating their traditions) ‘provide a corrective to those histories of Australia, which ignore, or give little place to, the role of religion (e.g. Grimshaw et al. 1996; Macintyre 2004)’ (Bouma 2006, p. 31).

### **Accessibility of UBI Archives**

That the Universal Brotherhood Incorporated has been defunct since 1989 has meant that its archives (if not dispersed or lost) are more open than those of most functioning NRMs. There is no longer a ‘brand’ with an ‘image’ to project or uphold – something that inhibits research into many functioning NRMs. Marybeth Ayella’s paper “‘They Must be Crazy’”: Some of the difficulties in Researching “Cults”” (1993, pp. 108–124) focuses on methodological problems connected with ‘how one does research on groups popularly labelled as “cults”’ (ibid., p. 108). Ayella raises important issues, such as gaining initial access to the group; establishing rapport with members; the sampling of members; the researcher as ‘potential convert’; maintaining access to the group; the outdated nature of time-specific ‘snapshots’; and how representative of a group field research can be. These and other related questions reveal the fraught nature of ‘outsider’ research into ‘insider’ motivation and positioning. Social interaction may be ‘observed’ and duly commented upon by a researcher, but axiomatically this will be from an outsider perspective. What is going on in the heads of insiders is unlikely to be shared, let alone understood by the outsider – however empathetic a researcher may work to become.

## The Challenge of NRMs

It is the challenge that NRMs present to both traditional religious and secular society that makes them such an important field of study. A simple test of their innovation lies in the way that NRMs have the uncanny ability to antagonise both religious and secular steams of society simultaneously. Is it because they resist the cultural drift towards hegemony, carving out uncomfortable and provoking alternatives? Whatever the reasons, it is clear that NRMs obstinately stand outside both religious and secular mainstreams – a characteristic which almost ensures their ‘cult’ *othering* by the media.

Unaccepted by the mainstream of both the religious and secular strands of society, it is inevitable that feelings of rejection will escalate within such movements. The belief that they are being persecuted is common (and indeed this may sometimes be the case). A 24/7 communal hot-house live-in religious group creates both the fertile soil and the micro-climate in which conspiracy theories ripen – and on both sides of the NRM fence. The larger society or ‘the world’ is seen by the NRM as ‘controlled and manipulated’ by some *world-wide conspiracy*; while the NRM – “the cult” – is seen by society as equally ‘controlled and manipulated’ by its powerful, charismatic and *ipso facto* corrupt leader(s). Such dynamics consequently play against each other to widen the gap between NRMs and society – especially when the media, egged on by anticult lobbyists, freely use ‘cult’ discourse rhetoric to whip up moral panic.<sup>71</sup>

This research addresses the above issue. Through an understanding of the lives of those who were to create a NRM, the gradual development of a movement emerges. Such an approach works to maximise social understandings of NRM phenomena, rather than driving towards judgment.

New Religious Movements are known for their marginal thinking, radical social ‘othering’, emphasis on lifestyle reform and personal transformations, and eclectic re-

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<sup>71</sup> A ‘moral panic’ is the intensity of feeling expressed in a population about an issue that appears to threaten the social order (Jones 1999). Stanley Cohen, author of *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1973) is credited with coining the term. A moral panic occurs when ‘a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests’ (Cohen 1973, p. 9). Those who start the panic when they fear a threat to prevailing social or cultural values are known by researchers as ‘moral entrepreneurs’, while people who supposedly threaten the social order have been described as ‘folk devils’ ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moral\\_panic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moral_panic), accessed 20.3.2011).

mixing of many long-established religious, political, and esoteric traditions, often in combination with equally hybridised physical and psychological regimes of ‘fitness’. This study suggests that the social experimentations of NRMs and the way they are (mis)represented in the media (for good or ill) have made a substantial contribution to the fabric of society and will continue to do so. The issues tackled by people like the Robinsons, and NRMs like the Universal Brotherhood, have helped position the ‘mass consciousness’ (a term employed by Fred Robinson) for the uptake of important cultural changes. Concepts such as ‘sustainability’ – both environmental and social – were part of most NRM platforms of the 1960s and ’70s. Notwithstanding the damage some of these NRMs have inflicted upon individuals, or even whole groups, and certainly many of the causes they espoused, they certainly helped popularise such issues (see for instance Hall 2003).

In tackling the particular mindset of the Robinsons’ developing schema, this study will examine the NRMs they either joined or investigated from the 1930s until they together formed (with their young alignees) the Universal Brotherhood in the early 1970s. Their attitude to the broader society within which they developed is discussed, and counter-pointed with an analysis of the ways in which NRMs tend to be stereotypically depicted in media representations, and so in the consequent responses of the broader society. The ‘cult’ stereotype is examined across the changing media reports of the pre-history of this 1970s movement. Textual analysis of news-media reports and feature articles about both Fred Robinson and the communities he was involved with, and others he tried to initiate prior to meeting Mary Broun are especially revealing, showing in detail how the media were then framing shifts around Robinson and the NRM he was part of. Always reporting according to the social structures dominant in the day, these data show how social conventions are clustered into the sets or networks which Michel Foucault (1981) called *orders of discourse* (Fairclough 1989, p. 28) – and subsequently, how such orders pre-position new or emergent NRMs.

This study will show that as the Robinsons extended their influence within the New Age network of Australian society in mid-1960s, media reporting shifted from earlier framings within well-established ‘religious/health crank’ or ‘political ratbag’ emphases,

to espouse a relatively sober reporting of ‘communities’ positioned as religiously and spiritually inclined. This orientation was not to last.

While adherents of present day NRMs are still sincerely searching for what they believe will be a more meaningful and authentic life, often led by persuasive, charismatic and intensely motivated visionaries, they are now more likely to be positioned as aligned with mass suicide/murder as enacted at Jonestown in 1978; or with terrorism as orchestrated by the *Aum Shinrikyo* sect’s leader Shoko Asahara;<sup>72</sup> or the repression of religion, as in the Chinese Government response to *Falun Gong*;<sup>73</sup> or with ‘lifestyle’ rather than ‘spiritual regimes. Western Buddhism for instance is often rehearsed in magazines and lifestyle television, but more as a health and exercise regime than as a religious tradition. Finally, today’s NRM’s are likely to be situated alongside the re-emergence of ‘secret’ inner-circle groups inside established religions, such as *Opus Dei* in the Catholic Church, increasingly identified in media discourse with right-wing political lobbying.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Shoko Asahara has been convicted of ordering the 1989 murder of Tsutsumi Sakamoto (an *anti-cult* lawyer) along with his wife and child; and masterminding the 1995 sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway which killed 12 people and injured some 5,500 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sakamoto\\_family\\_murder](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sakamoto_family_murder), accessed 1.12.2010).

<sup>73</sup> Amnesty International has been calling on the Chinese Government to stop the mass arbitrary detentions, unfair trials and other human rights violations resulting from the crackdown on the Falun Gong and other groups branded by the Government as ‘heretical organisations’ ... All the information available indicates that the crackdown is politically motivated, with legislation being used retroactively to convict people on politically-driven charges, and new regulations introduced to further restrict fundamental freedoms (*China: The Crackdown on Falun Gong and other so called Heretical Organizations*, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA17/011/2000/en/7a361a8e-df70-11dd-aaaa-7d9091d4638f/asa170112000en.html>, accessed 1.12.2010). It is worth noting that there is no precise legal definition for ‘heretical organisation’ in China. Furthermore, the government’s current crackdown on these groups raises the question of who is entitled to determine which group is ‘heretical’ (ibid., p. 28). *Power of the Wheel: The Falun Gong Revolution* (Adams, Adams & Galati 2000) is a useful study in that it explores the origins of the founder Li Hongzhi’s spiritual belief system; the brutal suppression of the Falun Gong ‘practitioners’ (a term used in place of ‘follower’); important components of the teachings; and their roots in Chinese traditional religious systems. The contrast between ‘Li’s undeniable achievements with a selection of his more outrageous actions and utterances’ (Author’s Note, xii-xiii) are reviewed alongside the reasons for China’s battle against the Falun Gong.

<sup>74</sup> Opus Dei, is an organisation of the Catholic Church that teaches that everyone is called to holiness and that ordinary life is a path to sanctity. The majority of its membership are lay people, with secular priests under the governance of a prelate (bishop) appointed by the pope. ‘Opus Dei’ is Latin for ‘Work of God’, hence the organisation is often referred to by members and supporters as ‘the Work’. Controversies about Opus Dei have centred on criticisms of its alleged secretiveness, its recruiting methods, the alleged strict rules governing members, the practice by celibate members of its alleged elitism and misogyny, and the alleged right-leaning politics of most of its members. Opus Dei received international attention due to Dan Brown’s novels, *Angels and Demons* (2000), and *The Da Vinci Code* (2003) and their film versions ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opus\\_Dei](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opus_Dei), accessed 5.6.2011).

By exploring what the Universal Brotherhood taught, how it reworked existing resources to match its social context, and how some of its teachings may still be able to address issues of today, this research will suggest that NRMs, even when overtly positioned by the media as *othered* ‘cults’ resistant to mainstream culture, can still work to illuminate that mainstream. The forms which NRMs take within their moment of broadest appeal speak to their links with ongoing social values and the ascendancy of central cultural initiatives at certain moments. Allegations made against a given New Religious Movement are, it will be argued, indicative. By tracing this one particular movement’s central figures, their beliefs and practices, from the 1930s until 1971, the project aims to tease out the roles such cultural activities play for both internal adherents and the mainstream culture, using as data both the external texts: press clippings; and the internal texts: the Robinsons’ New Age circulars and autobiographical writing.

This research re-assembles and highlights the social contributions and cultural innovations proposed, and to some extent achieved, by Fred and Mary Robinson, prior to the forming of the Universal Brotherhood Community. While recording and detailing the weaknesses and idiosyncrasies of the group that evolved – and indeed of its leaders – there will be an equal focus on the many positive contributions made to both individual destinies, and the broader social thinking of the day. The life style experimentations of the group will be explored, with some themes shown in retrospect as daring and innovative, while others seem curious anachronisms. Above all, this study reveals how any attempt to read the Australian ‘counterculture’ communal initiatives of the sixties and seventies from within the dominant ‘cult’ literature of today, produces a number of distortions within both its aims and its achievements.

While the Universal Brotherhood may never have been as successful, nor as influential, as it sought to be, the movement did contribute to positive and enduring social changes and culturally meaningful interventions. This study will argue that the UBI is in no way deserving of the negativity within the reflective media representations of the twenty-first century – particularly Critchley’s ABC documentary for *Compass*, ‘The

Brotherhood' (2009). The various voices that write and speak about NRMs however mainly contribute to and support such media positioning.

## **NRM Commentators' Voices**

A major contributor to the general negativity building around NRMs has been the location of the major strands of research within organisations dedicated to 'cult' overthrow. The bulk of the literature exploring and representing the history and practices of NRMs has been produced by the following groups of researchers.

### **1.) The Disenchanted Former Members' Voices**

This category includes those with an urgent need to denounce their former beliefs and the leaders they once trusted. In the sociological sense such ex-members can be termed apostates.<sup>75</sup> There are two major streams of this kind of research. The first includes those who write (and often self-publish) an autobiographical account of their experiences in a 'cult'. Such texts are understandably full of emotion, regret and accusation. While cathartic for the writer, and perhaps very helpful in unpacking some of the excesses of NRMs, these texts are usually anything but measured. Examples of Australian contributions to such literature are Ian Blair Hamilton's *Awake Among the Sleeping: Confessions of a Cult Leader* (2000), a thinly veiled fictional account of his experience as a second tier leader in a psychologically controlling spiritual group; and Jane Stork's *Breaking the Spell: My Life as a Rajneeshee* (2009), an account of the author's life – and indeed crimes – as a member of the Rajneesh movement.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> The terms 'Apostasy' and 'Apostate' are used by sociologists to mean renunciation and criticism of, or opposition to, a person's former religion, in a technical sense, and without pejorative connotation. The American sociologist David G. Bromley (1998) defines the apostate role as one that occurs in a highly polarised situation in which an organisation's member undertakes a total change of loyalties by allying with one or more elements of an oppositional coalition without the consent or control of the organisation ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostates#Sociological\\_definitions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostates#Sociological_definitions), accessed 24.11.2010).

<sup>76</sup> 'Rajneesh movement' is a term used by Hugh Urban (2005, p. 171) and other commentators to refer collectively to persons inspired by the Indian mystic Osho, formerly known as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (1931–1990), particularly initiated disciples, referred to as neo-sannyasins. These were formerly known as 'Rajneeshees' or 'Orange People' because of the orange and later red, maroon and pink clothes they used from 1970 until 1985. Members of the movement are sometimes called Oshoites in the Indian press. The movement was controversial in the 1970s and 1980s, due to its founder's hostility to traditional values ... ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajneesh\\_movement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajneesh_movement), accessed 5.6.2011).



The second stream of research derives from those ex-adherents of NRMs groups who, undertake graduate and post graduate studies to explore their experiences. While such research has contributed greatly to the inner workings of NRMs, the focus still tends to be negative. The ‘cult’ stereotype is thus reified through such research, by adding to the literature that continues to use the ‘cult’ descriptor – accenting cultic ‘apartness’ from society. Books such as Janja Lalich’s *Bounded Choice: True Believers and Charismatic Cults* (2004) is an example of psychologically focused research on a ‘cult’ she had been involved with. Lalich had formerly published a PhD dissertation: ‘Bounded Choice: The Fusion of Personal Freedom and Self Renunciation in Two Transcendent Groups’ (2000). Prior to this Madeleine Landau Tobias and Lalich had written *Captive Hearts, Captive Minds: Freedom and Recovery from Cults and Abusive Relationships* (1994).

I have included a critique of this book’s front and back cover subtitling here, as these formulae reveal how a title, along with its cover’s design and text (much like a newspaper headline and the bolded sub-headings for any print media article) can play a significant role in reifying the ‘cult’ stereotype – notwithstanding the good research that might well be between these covers. The rhetorical act of linking the word ‘Captive’ with ‘Hearts and Minds’; the phrases ‘Freedom and Recovery’ with ‘from Cults’ (without any qualifiers); and ‘Abusive Relationships’ connected to ‘Cults’ – as if they are *ipso facto* joined at the hip – can be seen as a negative positioning of innovative religions. Thorn laden branches criss-cross this front cover page, providing the semiotic warning: ‘beware’. The caption at the bottom of the cover assures the reader of the intellectual veracity of the title, and so of pernicious ‘cults’ in general. The bolded and capitalised title emphasises the message.

***CAPTIVE HEARTS, CAPTIVE MINDS*** is must reading for everyone who wants to understand the powerful appeal that cults have for so many ordinary people, using so many disguises, with so many subtle tactics. This book’s wisdom is vital for us all (Tobias & Lalich 1994, front cover).

Signed off by ‘Philip G. Zimbardo PhD, Professor of Psychology, Stanford University’<sup>77</sup> (ibid.), this academically-endorsed book’s title page says nothing that

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<sup>77</sup> Philip G. Zimbardo (1933–) is an American psychologist and a professor emeritus Stanford University. He is best known for the Stanford prison experiment, a study of the psychological effects of becoming a prisoner or prison guard conducted from August 14 –20, 1971. The experimental process and the results remain controversial ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanford\\_Prison\\_Experiment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanford_Prison_Experiment), accessed 3.8.2011).

could help to understand this maligned and little understood sector of society, beyond its endorsement of already-established positions. The circumstances in the relatively small number of cases of actual abuse within cults have been recognised by most scholars as being so different from one another, that generalisations between NRMs, and even within a specific NRM at different moments and with varying personnel, remain a problematic proposition. Saliba notes that one must be wary of writers ‘who draw up elaborate lists of unfavourable characteristics that are indiscriminately applied to all new religions’ (2003, p. 21). The back cover of Tobias and Lalich’s book embarks however on just this exercise, under a capitalised heading that suggests one’s ‘self’ is ‘lost’ or ‘stolen’ when one becomes part of a New Religious Movement:

**TAKE BACK YOURSELF!**

Former cult members suffer fear, depression, confusion, low self-esteem, and posttraumatic stress, whether they were in a group or a one-on-one abusive relationship. *Captive Hearts, Captive Minds* provides the hands on help they need to recover from manipulation and mind control (Tobias & Lalich 1994, back cover).

This back cover deserves further examination, as it is here that the stereotype is fleshed out – it is the back cover’s text that usually sells books.<sup>78</sup> The longitudinal strips of text endorsing the book sit on either side of a central panel of text. The first endorsement begins with “‘In a time of dangerously increasing irrationality, it is not surprising – though it is tragic – that cults attract so large a number of adherents” – Steve Allen, author and entertainer’<sup>79</sup> (Tobias & Lalich 1994, back cover). Beside this text in the central panel (likely to be read next) is the following:

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<sup>78</sup> Popular book design advice suggests that most people spend more time (at least double) reading and looking at the back cover than they spend on the front cover. While the front of the book must help to grab their attention, it’s what is on the back that will help them make their decision. Although different genres will require particular variances, the essential information needed for the back cover of a book is the following: the author’s picture, biography and qualifications to write the book, along with the features and benefits of reading the book (<http://cleverlink.com.au/design/book-cover>, accessed 21.3.20011).

<sup>79</sup> Stephen Valentine Patrick William ‘Steve’ Allen (1921– 2000) was an American television personality, musician, actor, comedian and writer. He was notoriously contemptuous of Rock and Roll music, yet he was one of the first to present Elvis Presley on network television, finding a way to ‘satisfy the Puritans’. He assured viewers that he would not allow Presley ‘to do anything that would offend anyone’ (Altschuler 2003, p. 90). Allen had Elvis sing “Hound Dog” to an actual hound – both wearing the top hat and the white tie and tails of a “high class” musician ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steve\\_Allen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steve_Allen), accessed 21.3.2011). I have particularly mentioned this, as Mary Robinson was an unlikely fan of Elvis Presley, buying his Gospel LPs such as *His Hand in Mine – Elvis* (1960) and *How Great Thou Art – Sung by Elvis* (1967), the latter of which won a Grammy in the Best Sacred Performance category. Being a fan myself I noticed these LPs in Mary’s collection and this mutual appreciation helped to bridge our generation gap.

In America today an estimated 5,000 cults have affected upward of 10 million people. Whether their focus is religion, politics, therapy, or self-improvement, cults exact an inestimable cost, both emotionally and financially, from those who join. This book can help (Tobias & Lalich 1994, back cover).

The above is casting a wide net, making unsubstantiated claims about ‘inestimable costs’, without a mention of any positive contributions from – by the cover’s own admission – a huge sector of society. Such *moral panic-mongering* on the cover is designed to take all sorts of readers captive. The text is an advertising gambit that seeks to cover all bases, for the next endorsement turns to the supposed ‘healing stages’ of ‘cult recovery’, as if being a member of one of the over 5,000 groups automatically made them ‘sick’:

This comprehensive book talks the former cult member through all the necessary healing stages – from understanding the effects of mind control and cult involvement to taking positive steps towards a healthy, balanced recovery (ibid.).

The above was contributed by Carol Giambalvo, author of *Exit Counselling: A Family Intervention* (1995), a book released almost simultaneously with the book she endorses,<sup>80</sup> thus marking the comments as having a vested interest in a co-merchandising gambit. Another endorsement comes from Cynthia S. Kisser, Executive Director, of the (now transformed) Cult Awareness Network (CAN).<sup>81</sup> This text couches the book as a self-help resource: ‘an invaluable tool for anyone trying to manage her or his own recovery from a cult experience’ (ibid.).

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<sup>80</sup> Carol Giambalvo cofounded ReFocus, a US support and referral network for former members of cults. She has served as a Thought Reform Consultant since 1984. Giambalvo is on the Board of Directors for the International Cultic Studies Association. She also works as the Director of the International Cultic Studies Association’s Recovery Programs. She considers herself an ex-cult member. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carol\\_Giambalvo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carol_Giambalvo), accessed 21.3.2011).

<sup>81</sup> The Cult Awareness Network (CAN) was founded in the wake of the 1978 deaths of members of the People’s Temple and the assassination of Congressman Leo J. Ryan in Jonestown, Guyana. CAN is now owned and operated by associates of the Church of Scientology, an organisation that the original founders of CAN strongly opposed. Prior to its hostile takeover CAN provided information on groups that it considered to be cults, as well as support and referrals to exit counsellors and deprogrammers. Cynthia Kisser, the then executive director of CAN, was quoted in a controversial *TIME* article titled ‘The Thriving Cult of Greed and Power’ (Behar, 1991). These comments and other forms of criticism from CAN garnered the attention of the Church of Scientology and Landmark Education, and both separately began malicious litigation proceedings against the organisation... The ‘New CAN’ organisation (also known as the Foundation for Religious Freedom) has caused both confusion and controversy ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cult\\_Awareness\\_Network](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cult_Awareness_Network), accessed 21.3.2011).

It is ironic that ‘totalising cults’ are critiqued in such a totalising fashion, with stereotypes that inhibit attitudinal change within the mainstream, while driving cults behind yet higher walls to seek protection against what seems to them like persistent persecution, without any effort to understand their own positions. Many NRMs are understandably cynical about ‘The World’s’ sincerity or genuine interest in understanding their aims and objectives; thus causing such groups to find conspiracy theories all the more attractive.

## 2.) Theologically Correct Voices

Representatives of rival mainstream religious groups (in the West mainly Christian) are generally convinced of the correctness of their own ‘anticult’ stance in contrast to the New Religious Movement or ‘cult’ under their scrutiny.<sup>82</sup> Even when such Christian authors/activists place a high value on religious freedom, they unswervingly maintain their position. A good Australian example can be seen in the writing of Adrian van Leen, who wrote to me critiquing the Universal Brotherhood’s beliefs back in the mid-1970s. We corresponded for some time; both appreciating some points the other made and disagreeing on others. The dialogue was always cordial and never became heated. We have been in touch more recently since the writing of a *West Australian* article: ‘How a Hippie Dream Fell Apart’ (2006) by Norman Aisbett, a journalist who had also written an article about van Leen. Again we were in touch during the making of ‘The Brotherhood’ (Critchley 2009) when the filming of an interview between us had been contemplated; however our cordial relationship did not fit the dramatic polemic of ‘cult’ versus ‘anticult’, so the interview never took place. Friendly adversaries are rare in the domain of NRMs, discussions between those who have concerns about them (including those within the movements themselves) seem to antagonise the *inner-bigot*.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> The Christian ‘countercult’ or ‘anticult’ movement is a collective description for many, mostly unrelated, Christian ministries and individual Christians who oppose religious groups whose doctrines or practices do not fit within their definition of mainstream Christianity, and which they consider to be ‘cults’. They are also known as ‘discernment ministries’ ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian\\_countercult\\_movement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_countercult_movement), accessed 24.11. 2010).

<sup>83</sup> The idea of an ‘inner-bigot’ relates to James Baldwin’s quote ‘We contain the other hopelessly and forever’ (<http://www.dailyafflictions.com/affliction5.html>, accessed 5.6.2011).

### 3.) Deprogrammer Voices

Agents of deprogramming services include private investigators employed to snatch family members said to have been ‘kidnapped’ by ‘cults’. In the early 1970s, Ted Patrick, a person with no formal training counselling at the time, intervened in what he saw as the ‘programming’ of some of his family members by David Berg the leader of Family International. He called his intervention ‘deprogramming’.<sup>84</sup> Deprogramming is an action that attempts to force a person to abandon allegiance to a group of any kind. In the domain of NRMs it relates to attempts to ‘rescue’ adherents.

(T)hose who maintain that the new religions are responsible for enticing and brainwashing young adults against their wills propound the equally straightforward solution, namely, that their members should be deprogrammed and subjected to traditional therapy (Saliba 2003, p. 155).

Methods and practices may involve kidnapping and coercion. Deprogramming is often commissioned by relatives, often parents of adult children, who object to their membership in an organisation or group. Such kidnapping interventions have led to freedom of religion and civil rights controversies.<sup>85</sup>

In 1988 the sociologist of religion, Eileen Barker,<sup>86</sup> founded the London based INFORM (Information Network Focus on Religious Movements) using funding from the British Home Office, Britain’s mainstream churches, foundations and enquirers with

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<sup>84</sup> Deprogramming sometimes involves abduction and typically involves forced detention. The actual deprogramming takes place when it is deemed possible to ‘pick up’ the cult member, and when it is convenient for the deprogrammer. Typically, the cult member is driven to a secret location and guarded 24 hours a day, often with no privacy, even in the bathroom. Windows are sometimes nailed shut to prevent escape. The deprogramming continues for days, and sometimes weeks, until the cult member snaps out of the cult’s mind-control (or successfully pretends to do so) (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deprogramming>, accessed 3.8.2011).

<sup>85</sup> The validity and legality of involuntary deprogramming has been attacked by members of NRMs, civil libertarian movements, and sociology scholars (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deprogramming>, accessed 3.8.2011).

<sup>86</sup> Eileen Barker’s *The Making of a Moonie: Choice or Brainwashing?* (1984) is based on almost seven years study of Unification Church members (informally called “Moonies”). The text is recognised as one of the most comprehensive and influential studies of the process of conversion to NRMs. However the countercult/anticult mind-control proponent authors of *Cults in our Midst* (Singer & Lalich 1995) criticised Barker’s research, calling her a ‘pro-cult apologist’ for adopting an ‘apologist stance’ towards the Unification Church, and subsequently engaging in acrimonious accusations of ethical impropriety. Barker responded saying, ‘We are not cult apologists. People make a lot of noise without doing serious research – so much so that they can end up sounding as closed to reason as the cults they’re attacking’ ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eileen\\_Barker](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eileen_Barker), accessed 3.8.2011).

the aim of providing neutral and up to date information to government officials, scholars, the media, the public and particularly relatives of those who have joined a NRM.<sup>87</sup>

#### **4.) The Psychologist Voice**

Psychologists may be employed to counsel such ‘returned’ individuals; they are known in North America as exit counsellors. Exit counselling is an intervention designed to persuade an individual to leave a group perceived to be a cult. However, unlike deprogramming, it is a voluntary procedure. The follower is treated with respect, can leave any time, and the decision to stay with the group or leave it is wholly up to the follower and will be accepted by the exit counsellor.

#### **5.) The Lawyer’s and the Law’s Voices and Actions**

Lawyers are employed to act for clients suing a group they were once a part of. Some of these have become vocal specialists in the area, employing anticult psychologists and theologians to provide ‘evidence’. On the other side of the binary are lawyers who defend litigiously-inclined NRMs.

The various national law agencies charged with investigating possible breaches of the law, and in an emergency taking action, have also contributed significantly to the debate – sometimes with disastrous results, as in the Waco Siege.<sup>88</sup> Direct interventions of this sort by agencies of the Justice System (in the US in particular) position NRMs and their

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<sup>87</sup> The founding of INFORM was motivated by a shared impression among clergy and academics that groups hostile to cults often aimed to feed rather than alleviate enquirers’ fears. The British Home Office had received many complaints related to NRMs from concerned parents, but did not feel that any of the existing counter-cult and anti-cult groups deserved state funding. INFORM was seen to answer that need ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/INFORM \(Information Network Focus on Religious Movements](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/INFORM_(Information_Network_Focus_on_Religious_Movements)), accessed 3.8.2011).

<sup>88</sup> The Waco siege began on February 28, 1993, and ended violently 50 days later on April 19. The siege began when the United States Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) attempted to execute a search warrant at the Branch Davidian ranch at Mount Carmel, a property located nine miles (14 km) east-northeast of Waco, Texas. On February 28, shortly after the attempt to serve the warrant, an intense gun battle erupted, lasting nearly 2 hours. In the aftermath of this armed exchange, four agents and six followers of David Koresh had been killed. Upon the ATF’s failure to execute the search warrant, a siege was initiated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The siege ended 50 days later when a second assault was made and a fire destroyed the compound. Seventy-six people (24 of them British nationals) died in the fire, including more than 20 children, two pregnant women, and Koresh himself ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waco\\_siege](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waco_siege), accessed 29.3.2011).

adherents as criminals; their actions become extreme instances of anti-social behaviour, and their beliefs and practices resultantly either eccentric, or malevolent.

## 6.) The Journalist's Voice

Journalists seek sensational 'cult' narratives, usually around salacious sexual issues and mind control. While shifts in media voices, as they relate to Fred and Mary Robinson and the UBI, are fleshed out in the chapters that follow, it is useful to say something here about the way employment of media reporting about NRMs has shifted. The most notable event related to a New Religious Movement Community in the twentieth-century was undoubtedly Jim Jones's orchestrated murders and the People's Temple mass suicide at Jonestown in Guyana on the 18<sup>th</sup> November 1978. The shift in positions, from Jim Jones the heroic integrationist and socialist figure, to the *evil cult leader instigator of the mass suicide/murder* is important to exhume – as Jonestown is the one event that changed the reporting of all NRMs worldwide, including the UBI. The media has forever after emplotted the event in its stories of NRMs – almost as if the event somehow defined what a 'cult' was. Jonestown was used in this way, even in the reflective documentary on the UBI 'The Brotherhood' (Critchley 2009).

In reality those within most NRMs would have learnt from this event *what not to do*. The UBI certainly examined how far off the path this charismatic leader strayed to influence the membership of his group – even to rehearsing the enactment of the communal atrocity of revolutionary mass suicide. It was a warning to NRMs of the dangers of their own potential to be influenced by a fanatical leader. It was also a warning to the press not to trust what seemed to be positive within the domain of 'cults' generally – even though almost all NRMs were poles apart from the politically configured Jonestown, they all came under suspicion.

It is useful here to observe the Ricoeurian about-face *employment-shift* that occurred; to review how positive the media had been, and how much respect Jones had within influential circles in the period prior to the tragedy. What happened at Jonestown on the day of the murders and suicides has been etched into cultural history by a particular style of employment. How Jones had been emplotted by journalists earlier in his career has been almost erased by the event which has become known simply as 'Jonestown'.

A significant number of media journalists had given Reverend Jim Jones very good press in the earlier years of his leadership of the People's Temple. Jones had significantly helped to integrate churches, restaurants, a telephone company, the police department, a theatre, an amusement park, and a Methodist Hospital. After swastikas were painted on the homes of two African American families, Jones personally walked the neighbourhood comforting them, while counselling white families not to move, in order to prevent white flight.<sup>89</sup> He also set up stings to catch restaurants refusing to serve African American customers (Reiterman 1982, pp. 71–72). When Jones was accidentally placed in the black ward of a hospital after a collapse in 1961, he refused to be moved and began to make the beds, and empty the bed pans of black patients. Political pressures resulting from Jones's actions caused hospital officials to desegregate the wards (Reiterman 1982, p. 76). In California Jones was newsworthy for many positive reasons and was able to forge media alliances with key columnists at the *San Francisco Chronicle* and other media outlets (ibid., pp. 285, 306 and 587.).

Jones's credibility was supported via the connection he had with progressive political figures of the time. Willie Brown, speaker of the Californian State Assembly supported the People's Temple from 1975 to 1978 while it was being investigated for alleged criminal wrongdoing. Brown attended the Temple perhaps a dozen times and served as master of ceremonies at a testimonial dinner for Jones where he stated in his introduction 'Let me present to you a combination of Martin King, Angela Davis, Albert Einstein ... Chairman Mao' (ibid., p. 308). The gay activist and public office bearer Harvey Milk spoke at political rallies at Jones's Temple, later writing to Jones:

Rev Jim,

It may take me many a day to come back down from the high that I reach today. I found something dear today. I found a sense of being that makes up for all the hours and energy placed in a fight. I found what you wanted me to find. I shall be back. For I can never leave (Harvey Milk, in VanDeCarr 2003).

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<sup>89</sup> 'White flight' is a term that originated in the United States, starting in the mid-twentieth-century, and applied to the large-scale migration of whites of various European ancestries from racially mixed urban regions to more racially homogeneous suburban or exurban regions ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White\\_flight](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_flight), accessed 15.6.2011).



The People's Temple also served an important role in the mayoral election victory of George Moscone.<sup>90</sup> Moscone appointed Jones as the Chairman of the San Francisco Housing Authority Commission. Jones was thus able to gain public support through his contact with prominent local and national United States politicians. For instance, Jones and Moscone met privately with vice presidential candidate Walter Mondale on his campaign plane days before the 1976 election and Mondale publicly praised the Temple (Reiterman 1982, p. 303–4). Jones was also publicly praised by other public figures such as First Lady Rosalynn Carter.<sup>91</sup> The positive publicity afforded Jones by most of the press, some up until the news of the murder suicide broke, reveals how the press was influenced by the group and through the indirect influence of public figures associated with Jones. It is also important to understand that Jones was more political in his thinking than he was religious.

Jones had first started building Jonestown in 1974 as a means to create both a 'socialist paradise' and a 'sanctuary' from the media scrutiny which had started in 1972 (Hall 1987, p. 132). By 1977 Marceline Jones (Jones's wife) admitted to the *New York Times* that as early as age eighteen, when he watched his then idol Mao Zedong overthrow the Chinese government, Jim Jones realised that the way to achieve social change through Marxism in the United States was to mobilise people through religion (Lindsay, 1978). She stated that 'Jim used religion to try to get some people out of the opiate of religion,' and had slammed the Bible on the table yelling 'I've got to destroy this paper idol!' (ibid.). The point being made here is that Jones's political motivations and affiliations with the Communist Party of the USSR were more important to him than any church including his own – but that this affiliation has not been highlighted by the press. Marceline Jones left their considerable wealth (over seven million dollars) to the

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<sup>90</sup> George Richard Moscone (1929 –1978) was an American attorney and Democratic politician. He was mayor of San Francisco from January 1976 until his assassination on November 27<sup>th</sup> 1978. In August 1977, following media scrutiny of Jones's alleged criminal wrongdoing, Moscone announced his office would not investigate Jones and the People's Temple. The later tragedy at Jonestown (November 18<sup>th</sup>) dominated national headlines at the time of Moscone's assassination (in the same incident as Harvey Milk was assassinated). Sometime after the Jonestown tragedy, former Temple members revealed that Jones had significantly influenced Moscone's 1976 election as Mayor of San Francisco ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_Moscone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Moscone), accessed 15.6.2011).

<sup>91</sup> Rosalyn Carter personally met with Jones on multiple occasions, corresponded with him about Cuba, and spoke with him at the grand opening of the San Francisco Democratic Party Headquarters where Jones garnered louder applause than Mrs Carter ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim\\_Jones#cite\\_note-48](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim_Jones#cite_note-48), accessed 15.6.2011).

Communist Party of the USSR.<sup>92</sup> This kind of information has been almost lost in the now almost mythical ‘religious cult’ stereotype which is the abiding cultural legacy of Jonestown – one that has been largely handed down via the media’s emplotment of Jones *after* the Jonestown tragedy. That the media’s earlier emplotment was an embarrassing miscalculation is a subject forgotten by almost all but a few sociologists. Jim Jones, the *crazy religious cult leader* is the popular image evoked by the word ‘Jonestown’ – becoming the endemic *cultural-image* of a ‘cult’ – and one that affected all NRMs, including the UBI and its legacy.

### **Journalists in Australia**

In Australia the individual investigative journalist still plays an important and useful part in providing understanding of NRMs. Sometimes journalists dissatisfied with the limits of short articles go on to write books that inform the public of the practices of religious groups which are hidden from society. An example is Michael Bachelard’s *Behind the Exclusive Brethren* (2008). Bachelard’s book stemmed from

... an innocent enough question from my editor in September 2006: would the Exclusive Brethren be participating in the Victorian state election? The answer I quickly discovered was ‘Yes’. My initial story in Melbourne’s *The Age* prompted a blizzard of correspondence from people desperate to tell their personal stories of heartbreak and hardship at the hands of the religion they had grown up in. It led to many more questions and answers (p. 3).

While Bachelard, like most journalists, does tend to favour the veracity of the psychological definition of ‘cults’ as put by the ‘anticult’ ex-members of the Exclusive Brethren, he does make the point that his book is not intended to vilify the individual members of the group or the group in general but is rather an attempt to ‘dig out the truth’ (ibid., p. 4). Bachelard speaks to the connection between society and the NRM when he says:

It is important to note that scrutiny is not vilification ... every religious or cultural group that plays a part in the national life should accept who they are and what they do is a legitimate topic for discussion in the public domain. This is particularly true of a group that, without voting, and without being candid about itself, seeks constantly to influence the political process (ibid.).

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<sup>92</sup> In a signed note found at the time of her death, Marceline Jones directed that the Jones’s funds were to be given to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union [http://jonestown.sdsu.edu/AboutJonestown/PrimarySources/financialLetters/letter\\_fromMarceline.pdf](http://jonestown.sdsu.edu/AboutJonestown/PrimarySources/financialLetters/letter_fromMarceline.pdf), accessed 15.6.2011).

## **The UBI and Australian Journalists**

One hundred and seventeen of the extant press publications – from mid 1971 when Fred Robinson began his tour to the Eastern States, until his death in 1983 – have been collected in conjunction with this research. These include feature articles written about Fred Robinson or the UBI, and letters to the press by Mary Robinson or a Member of the Community. Of the feature articles nine of these can be assessed as negatively portraying a ‘cult’ stereotype. Most articles are relatively balanced, providing information on the Community’s strengths and Fred Robinson’s common sense approach to many subjects. The outstanding characteristic is the way in which the press foreground Fred’s interest in UFOs and prophecy. While there are some important and influential exceptions – particularly after Jonestown – the Australian press can be assessed as having been relatively kind to both Fred Robinson and the UBI during this period.

It is important to recognise the work of one Australian journalist, Norman Aisbett, who came to the UBI Community on one of his first reporting jobs as a cadet journalist in 1973 – also one of the first reporters to come to Carranya. Aisbett wrote a number of articles on the Community through the 1970s and ’80s and maintained a policy of checking reports given to him with someone in the Community (usually me or Rosemary Gilmore, née Woods, or Mary Robinson) and would include our comments. He actually took pride in providing balanced and correct information. Aisbett rang me in 2006 wanting to write a retrospective feature article about the UBI; I was completing an honours degree at the time and was applying for an APA scholarship for the present study. We worked on the feature article together. He rang me when it was published to apologise for the headline: ‘How a Hippie Dream Fell Apart’, upset that the editor thought it necessary to employ the stereotype ‘hippie’. However, his desire to get the facts right; and my sense of not trying to dictate how the article should be written, made for an article that was informative and entertaining.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> The article can be viewed at <[http://www.cifs.org.au/Universal\\_Brotherhood.php](http://www.cifs.org.au/Universal_Brotherhood.php)>.

Such collaboration could happen more often. Having the press get simple information wrong is a real bugbear to those in NRMs. It is viewed as a lack of care at the least, and in many cases as a duplicitous act of bad faith; and in some instances as outright falsification. When such responses are expected cynicism becomes entrenched, leading to a belief that all members of the press are involved in a conspiracy against ‘the truth’. NRMs then build high, secretive walls, away from the prying and lying media – and this in turn increases media suspicion that the group is hiding something.

## **7.) The Sociologists’ Voices**

The voices of anthropologists, sociologists and ethnographers can be considered under three heads. Firstly there are those who see themselves as detached, impartial observers, making cultural commentaries as social scientists. Such *positivism* refers to a set of epistemological perspectives and philosophies of science which hold that the scientific method is the best approach to uncovering the processes by which both physical and human events occur. Such *positivist* approaches have been ‘a recurrent theme in the history of western thought from the Ancient Greeks to the present day’ (Cohen *et al.* 2005, p. 8).

Secondly, there are ‘outsider’ evaluations by researchers wanting to record and evaluate a group, the authentic voices of both founders and adherents, via a more participatory style of field research. As sincere and open to the group as such a researcher may be, the fact that they are not ‘part of’ the group has the disadvantage of being unable to fully empathise with the insider-positioning, or to have access to the thinking and inner-workings of the group they are examining.

Thirdly – and this is especially so in the NRM domain – there is research undertaken by those who are or have been members (and not only the apostates) of the group they are researching. While this ‘insider positioning’ appears to create problems around the issue of over-engaged ‘subjectivity’, it is perhaps a lesser obstacle than an ‘outsider positioning’ and the problems around the issue of disengaged ‘objectivity’. The value of having been intimately and subjectively connected with the object of one’s research from the inside is inestimable. There are however problems, which must be considered.

The presentation of a New Religious Movement via its own ‘insider’ literature is almost always positive, if not glowing, while the biographies written about their founders are usually hagiographies. ‘Cultism’ can inflame the insider, as much as its ‘anticult’ opposite – a focus endemic on the Internet, where a single Google search for ‘Anticult movement’ produces almost thirty six million results, the first being a Wikipedia overview of the topic.<sup>94</sup> A ‘cultic’ mindset, not so easily quantifiable, is nonetheless equally powerful in its way, entrenching members in support of their beliefs, and even sending them into persecution mode – but also producing equally fervent groups opposed to *other* cult practices. Conversely, some ‘anti-cultists’ exemplify ‘cultic’ behaviour better than the cultists themselves, as analysis of their own behaviours and discursive regimes suggests.

How then does a NRM deal simultaneously with the internal pressures of establishing a resistant alternative to the mainstream, and publicising its beliefs in an effort to seek validation from within that mainstream? One answer may be to consider NRMs as contributing to a form of ‘Thirdspace’ development: cultural spaces in which ideas and practices fuse and reform, rather than merely contend. Ray Oldenburg in *The Great Good Place* (1989) argues that social ‘third places’ such as cafes, bars, post offices, beauty parlours, general stores and community centres are crucially important for civil society, democracy, civic engagement and the establishment of a sense of place. While I do not attempt here to add NRMs to Oldenburg’s list, it is useful to think of about NRMs in the light of providing *another kind of social place*: one where people are able to explore dimensions of themselves they had not, for whatever reason, been able to explore in more central societal locations. The *first places* of the home; the *second places* of the workplace; and the *third places* which Oldenburg suggests are social anchors of community, are compacted into one inside NRMs – and especially within residential, (relatively) self-sufficient, yet alternative NRM Communities such as the UBI.

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<sup>94</sup> The *Anti-cult movement* (ACM) is a term used by academics and others to refer to groups and individuals who oppose cults and new religious movements. Sociologists David G. Bromley and Anson Shupe (1981) initially defined the ACM as a collection of groups embracing brainwashing-theory, but later observed a significant shift in ideology towards a ‘medicalisation’ of the memberships of NRMs (Shupe & Bromley 1994, pp. 9–14). Publications of the International Cultic Studies Association have disputed the appropriateness of the term ‘Anticult movement’ (see for example Michael Kropveld 2003), with Michael Langone preferring the label ‘cult critics’ rather than ‘anti-cult’ activists (2005) ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-cult\\_movement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-cult_movement), accessed 6.6.2011).

... daily life, in order to be relaxed and fulfilling, must find its balance in three realms of experience. One is domestic, a second is gainful or productive, and the third is inclusively sociable, offering both the basis of community and the celebration of it (Oldenburg 1989, p. 14).

New Religious Movements offer alternative nurturing 'places'; environments for people who have become dislocated from the 'first' and 'second' places of home and work, and find mainstream sociable 'third places' lacking in deeper meaning. NRMs are places where creative interaction and cultural innovation can occur. Such innovations however, do not come out of a vacuum. They are, as will be shown, born in the life-experiences of their founders' interactions in their own 'first', 'second' and *socially othered* 'third places', so that a complex and interconnected set of influences evolves.

Notwithstanding its many constrictions and weaknesses, the Universal Brotherhood Community provided a culturally innovative 'place'. This provision can be seen as one of the major cultural contributions of the movement. Admitting the disadvantages and dangers in such environments, it will be argued that NRMs in the past, the present, and probably in the future, can be shown to provide a sheltered environment which suits at least some people, for some period of their life. At the same time, NRMs are 'fusion points' for the experimental re-combination of a wider than usual set of social interactions and cultural ideas. Some New Religious Movements take on the almost impossible task of providing a satisfying physical location for all the 'places': 'first' (home), 'second' (work) and 'third' (social). The Robinsons' ambitious attempt at creating what they called an 'alternative society' was always going to be beyond the ability of their alignees to render. While this is likely to be so with most live-in, or 24/7 NRM Communities, it is also likely that groups will continue to try. This study offers a biographically focussed pre-history of one such group.

## Section II: Exhuming the Bio-histories

### Chapter 5: Life of Fred Robinson until Meeting Mary Broun

Central to the UBI is Fred Robinson, whose idiosyncratic fusion of ideas and beliefs finally fused into a rural community with many qualities of the NRM. This Chapter follows Fred Robinson's life from his birth in 1891 until he met Mary Broun-Robinson in 1961. The focus is on the intellectual and spiritual formative forces and turning points in his life. Included are details of some of the life phases which reveal how events and influences shaped him until his early seventies; preparing him for his time of public prominence as an octogenarian New Age guru, *catalyst and recruiter*, figure-head and prophet of the Universal Brotherhood Incorporated (UBI).

To examine the experiences and the teachings which influenced him this biographical study has been structured into four parts:

1. *Fred the Sugar Farmer Family Man*, including his very early life, until 1930;
2. *Fred the Social Credit Conspiracy Theorist*, until he left his first wife in 1936;
3. *Fred the Celibate Naturist Neophyte* of a Rosicrucian Order until about 1951;
4. *Fred the Wandering New Age Teacher*, until he met Mary Broun in late 1962.

Fred's early biography is vital in understanding him as 1960s co-founder of 'Shalam', regarded as 'The chief "coordinating information centre" of the New Age movement in Australia ... spreading the word of developments in the cosmic plan for earth...' (van Sommers 1966, p. 207); and as co-founder of the UBI during the 1970s. How he reached this position is likely however to require the tracking of multiple trajectories and influences – and to control the many strands of his history, I need to introduce the broader than usual set of citations and referencing conventions outlined in the opening section of the study (see 'Notes on the Text', p. ii).

Throughout this section of the study I use the *Lucinda calligraphy font* for Fred's expressions, to indicate his voice, and to mimic his *well-formed handwriting*. These expressions are remembered from personal conversations and public lectures during the

1970s, when he gave us all *a good earbashing*. These are not therefore verbatim quotes, so are not referenced.

Direct quotes from Fred Robinson's interviews in print media articles are also used to detail aspects of his earlier life. They help introduce his teachings in the chronology in which he first developed them. Where such published biographic information concurs with other primary and secondary research, and my own memory of his comments, I use the published record – thus confirming how much of his story is in the public domain – and accordingly, how wide his influence spread.

The feature article 'Honey is Money' for instance was published in the first edition of *Earth Garden* (4.2.1972). As a recorded interview in the question and answer format, it authentically represents Fred's unique rhetorical style. At the same time it introduces some of his *New Age information*, and recounts important details of his early history, in a form easily accessible to his 1970s target audience. Such quotes are reproduced as columned-intertexts to recreate the printed media in which they appeared.

When examining the period in which Fred Robinson lived in a gymnosophical (naturist) Rosicrucian Community, I have used extensive extracts from a primary text (designed as a recruiting brochure) to unpack the story of this New Religious Movement (NRM) of the 1930s and '40s – an experience which clearly shaped him from his early forties until he was sixty. Tabloid newspaper stories are also used to explore dramatic events within this religious community in the early 1950s. These longer quoted media representations examine and deepen an understanding of the cultural context, while exploring Fred's own career as an *alignee/follower/disciple/neophyte* of an NRM of the 1930s and '40s. Such biographic exploration helps to identify Fred Robinson as the *real McCosmic hippie* of his own generation, and the granddaddy of the 'kosmic kiddies' (De la Pasca 1975) of the 1970s. At the same time Fred was a practical, 'down-to-earth' exemplar – a person who, with his wife Mary, could say with conviction, *we've done it – we have created a little piece of heaven on earth*. The mix of these *up in the clouds yet down to earth* ingredients affected a niche audience perfectly primed for his message – especially those Fred recruited during the *ascendancy phase* of the Universal Brotherhood.



## Autobiographical Reluctance: Writing Fred

While Fred was charismatic, especially to his target audience, he focussed on talking about *the truth*, rather than the personal details of his early life. He said relatively little about the seventy years prior to meeting Mary Broun and starting Shalam. Fred often seemed especially uncomfortable for instance in recounting some of the details of his time as ‘Brother Fred’ the Rosicrucian, particularly when in the presence of his second wife Mary. My research explains the ambivalence. It would have been decidedly uncomfortable for Mary, had the all the details of his life been exposed.

There were then suppressions in the emplotment of Fred Robinson’s life: a life directed through the teachings of his most revered texts: *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception* (Heindel 1909), *Oahspe* (1883), and *The Urantia Book* (1955), but played out in practical and applied ways through his everyday living. For Fred texts were to be interpreted against the matters of the day: a near Ricoeurian principle, where constraints of a text as ‘a limited field of possible constructions’ (Ricoeur 1991, p. 160) could be re-ordered as contexts changed. The ‘cultural discordance’ of episodes of the past as read from the present called for progressive re-framings – and so parts of Fred’s life, past or present, moved forward and back in response. If there is, as Ricoeur put it (1991 p. 159), ‘a logic of uncertainty and qualitative probability’ in this life and its constant drive to interpret and make sense of ‘the discordant’, then Fred never stepped back from working to establish the most concordant interpretations– but always for *the needs of the moment* and ‘*The Work*’ in which he was engaged. ‘Faith does not shackle the creative imagination’ (*Urantia Book* 1995, p.1114). For Fred Robinsons, interpretation and the establishment of meaning involved a constant flow of interpretative thought.

The technique poses similar problems for this project of research, as it attempts to find coherence (concord) within often disparate, even contradictory, episodes and moments. Writing about my most influential mentor, while having been his publicity agent, spokesperson and student, has presented special challenges. I have been dealing with Fred’s legacy since he died in 1982. I decided some time ago to institute an ethical position and framework that could guide my writing. What would I say? Would I disclose confidences? How would I say what I wanted to say and to whom? How much

of myself and my current positions would I include? How would I critique Fred and his rhetoric? What style would I use?

I have not wanted to simply replicate Fred's own *meme* and his highly personal style of teaching, but to explore and examine further his cited references, and read some of the more recent research on these subjects. I wanted to wade back into the literature that formed his thinking, explore the groups that shaped his life, and examine the people who inspired him. I also want to step forward, to re-imagine the possibilities for his voice into the future, asking the question 'What might still be relevant today'?

Other questions followed. Would I come to some of the same conclusions? How much would I reject? How much would I accept? How much would I simply *keep in the corner of my consciousness for clarification at a later date*, to preserve for future readers some of the ambivalence which Fred Robinson himself always cultivated, and which my own experiences with him produced?

I need to ensure I am not unconsciously 'channelling' Fred, finding an academically viable way of spreading his meme and its simple and solution-oriented consciousness. I need to step back and away – and twenty five years *in the world* have helped this process. Fred now, is not quite 'Fred then' – and the consciousness behind the reminiscences produces similar levels of change and dual vision. As the writing progresses, for all that it is grounded in multiple layers of historical record, it takes on its own forms of hybridity.

## **Part 1: Fred the Sugar Farmer Family Man**

Information about Fred Robinson's life until he became a sugar farmer is sparse. This account is based largely upon my own memories of details he provided in various exchanges with me in the 1970s, with little opportunity for corroboration, since not only did he suppress much of his biographical detail from his own writings or media interviews, but none of his surviving children wish to contribute to any biography. Their reasons will become apparent as the narrative and analysis progress.

## Fred's early life

Fred Robinson was born on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1891 in Liverpool, in the metropolitan borough of Merseyside, historically part of Lancashire in the North West of England. Fred humorously denigrated his early upbringing: '...my mother brought me up to be a little gentleman, so I grew up thinking I was one of the most impractical people in the world' (Robinson, in *Earth Garden* 1972, p. 33). On a purely human note Fred recalled to me one of his earliest memories: 'I remember my great-grandfather sitting me on his knee and telling me about his experiences in the Battle of Waterloo [1815] ... he had a very bushy beard' (Robinson pers. comm., 1971). This story, which linked someone I knew with an event I had learned about only at school, gave me an unexpected human connection to a monumental moment – one which helped me to become more interested in history.

Fred often recounted how he felt out of place in England: *It was as if I was from another planet*. At school Fred became fascinated with Australia: *The new frontier of opportunity and sun*, a vision he recalled from the newspaper advertising of the day. Other than this romantic vision of Australia, another childhood passion was to shape his future – the love of reading the relatively new genre of science-fiction. While I remember Fred commenting briefly on Jules Verne's classics, I better remember his feeling of indebtedness to H.G. Wells, the writer who first engaged him to think outside the normal world into which he was born.

## Fred and H.G. Wells

I remember Fred telling me that as a child, teenager, and then as an adult, he had read and appreciated many of the books of H.G. Wells.<sup>95</sup> This early reading of Wells, until Fred's *spiritual revelation* in 1936, is perhaps a much more telling detail about his life than I had appreciated until I began this research. While there is much more that

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<sup>95</sup> Herbert George Wells (1866–1946) was an English author, now best known for his work in the science-fiction genre. He was also a prolific writer in many other genres, including contemporary novels, history, politics and social commentary. Together with Jules Verne, Wells has been referred to as 'The Father of Science Fiction'. Wells was an outspoken socialist and sympathetic to pacifist views ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H. G. Wells](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H._G._Wells), accessed, 22.9.2010).

could be said, in the following I have aligned Fred's passion for Wells's fiction as a boy and young man, with his oft used maxim as an octogenarian in the 1970s: '*Truth is stranger than fiction*'.<sup>96</sup>

It is important to note here that Fred believed in Evolution and Creation simultaneously – a position taken up in *The Urantia Book* (1955). It also must be noted that Fred often spoke against a static form of heaven or utopia; he was almost addicted to the word 'change'. A favourite saying was '*The only thing constant now is change*' (lectures 1970s). Fred saw the individual's spiritual status as either moving forward to *growth and life*, or backwards into *decay and death* – never should it be *static or stagnant*. 'One of Wells's innovations was the rejection of the static, millennial idea of utopia' (Parrinder 1970, p. 10). It is likely that Fred absorbed this idea from Wells:

The Utopia of the modern dreamer must needs differ in one fundamental aspect from the Nowheres and Utopias men planned before Darwin quickened the thought of the world. Those were all perfect and static States, a balance of happiness won forever against the forces of unrest and disorder that inhere in things ... Change and development were dammed back by invincible dams forever. But the Modern Utopia must not be static but kinetic, must shape not as a permanent state but as a hopeful stage, leading to a long ascent of stages (Wells 1905, I, i).

At the time the above was published Fred was a teenager of fourteen. He was a well educated young man; an avid reader, a fan of Wells's kind of fiction, and interested in ideas involving a modern utopia. It is therefore highly likely that he read *Modern Utopia*, especially as it was serialised in *The Fortnightly Review* in 1904–5. That Fred was encouraged by H.G. Wells to think outside the confines of *Old Age Piscean thinking* is certain. The following reveals themes which Fred took up later in life, revealing how some of Wells's fictions became facts to Fred Robinson:

Wells wrote several versions of Utopia, and some people have believed this was because he could never convince himself of any one of them. But Mark R. Hillegas [1967] is surely right in arguing that books like *The World Set Free* (1914), *A Modern Utopia* (1905) and *Men Like Gods* (1923) describe separate stages of the historical ascent. The summit is never seen. An unrecognisable physical evolution, brought about by eugenics rather than natural selection is implied. The Martians in *The War of the Worlds* (1898), for example, are not the bug eyed stereotypes of the horror film but a

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<sup>96</sup> This statement is a contraction of Mark Twain's statement, "Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because Fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; Truth isn't" ([http://thinkexist.com/quotation/truth\\_is\\_stranger\\_than\\_fiction-but\\_it\\_is\\_because/215894.html](http://thinkexist.com/quotation/truth_is_stranger_than_fiction-but_it_is_because/215894.html), accessed 21.9.2010).

fantasy based on atrophy of all human organs except the brain and hands; they were developed from an earlier sketch entitled 'The Man of the Year Million'. In the *Discovery of the Future* (1902) [non-fiction] Wells coined a vague, spectacular phrase for man's cosmic potential which he often repeated:

'a day will come ... when beings ... who are now latent in our thoughts and hidden in our loins, shall stand upon this earth as one stands upon a footstool, and shall laugh and reach out their hands amid the stars' (Wells 1902, cited in Parrinder 1970, p. 10).

Fred often insisted to his audiences of the 1970s that '*You are gods in the making*', sometimes quoting Jesus' statement that we too would be able to do great works.<sup>97</sup> It is also likely that through Wells's writing Fred first began thinking about space-people and planetary catastrophe as factors leading to the next stage of the planet's evolution – later imagined spiritually as a mystical yet evolutionary process, or as Fred put it, '*the Aquarian Age, the New Age; the fourth dimension; the next step in our evolution*' (Fred Robinson, lectures, 1970).

Wells did sometimes suggest space-travel as the ultimate human achievement, but this and other visions are really only carrots to persuade humanity to get on with organising and *planning the next stage* [italics mine], and he was equally alive to the intimations of catastrophe, even if he sometimes preferred to suppress them. His later works propound a sort of evolutionary mysticism to take the place of theocratic religion (Parrinder 1970, p. 11).

Fred Robinson's extremism, and his desire to escape the bonds of the controlled and pre-determined world in which he found himself, were likely to have been first nurtured in a *Wellsian* reading womb:

Wells's scientific romances alternate the ideas of hope and despair, mastery and slavery, release and submission, and in doing so they reflect the opposing images of predetermined life and utopian life which guide his social thought. Robert P. Weeks has described the structure of the 'special world' created in Wells's fiction:

It is a world enclosed by a network of limitations and dominated by the image of a man driven by a profound and, at times, an irrational desire to escape. Although the network appears at first to be impenetrable, the hero finally succeeds in disentangling himself. This action invariably creates in him 'a kind of hysterical exhilaration'. But ultimately he experiences defeat in the form of either disillusionment or of death (Weeks 1954, pp. 439–44; in Parrinder 1970, pp. 22–23).

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<sup>97</sup> The Biblical quote reads, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father' (John 14:12, KJV).

There are parallels in the above with the trajectory of Fred's life, as my biography will reveal. Fred was a Wellsian without ever enunciating it: 'A man breaking through the barriers; this is what can be loosely called the Wellsian myth' (Parrinder 1970, p. 23). It is likely that Fred was so interested in Wells's barrier-breaking cosmic thinking, that when the UFO phenomena came on the public scene in 1947 (with other influences which will become apparent) Fred was more than ready to champion the *Flying Saucers* as a precursor to and a sign of 'the changes to come'. Fred was, with the help of his boyhood and young manhood grounding in Wellsian thinking, inwardly readied and imaginatively prepared to become the cosmic New Age prophet of the 1960s and '70s in Australia – *the last frontier* – which he later also called *Austral Aquaria, the only continent in the East inhabited by the people of the West*, who would play a major part in the revelation of cosmic facts – 'truths' even stranger than Wells's fiction.

## Other Early Literary Influences

The young Fred Robinson was also likely to have been influenced by a range of other authors of the period, but a discussion of the possibilities is pure speculation. Fred did mention a number of authors who believed in Spiritualism, such as Oliver Lodge and Conan Doyle, but I also remember him mentioning G.K. Chesterton. In his early twenties, and being a well educated and thoughtful young man, it is altogether possible that Fred read *Heretics* (1909), and *What's Wrong with the World* (1910). Considering his later life it is useful to note the political, even countercultural, influence of G. K. Chesterton:

His politics fitted with his deep distrust of concentrated wealth and power of any sort. Along with his friend Hilaire Belloc, and in books like the 1910 "What's Wrong with the World", he advocated a view called "Distributionism" that was best summed up by his expression that every man ought to be allowed to own "three acres and a cow." Though not known as a political thinker, his political influence has circled the world. Some see in him the father of the "small is beautiful" movement and a newspaper article by him is credited with provoking Gandhi to seek a "genuine" nationalism for India rather than one that imitated the British (Heretics 2010, in foreword matter, 'The Author', p. 10).

## Fred the Cabin Boy

Not long after Fred left school he joined the British Merchant Navy as a cabin boy. He set sail from Liverpool on the *Jason*. He made a new friend on board in one Simon 'Sam' Baillie, and together they jumped ship at Sydney's Circular Quay late in 1910, as

illegal immigrants. Fred never did return to his homeland – his only overseas travel being to New Zealand. When he travelled there in the 1960s a passport was not required. It seems that Fred may have remained an illegal migrant all his life.

While it has been difficult to reconstruct Fred and Sam's movements after they arrived in Australia, it seems that they both went straight to 'Fairymead Plantation' near Bundaberg, for I sighted a postcard addressed to Sam and Fred written on 26<sup>th</sup> December 1910 from a Dutchman by the name of Tony Staifbergen of Gin Gin. Fred worked in a number of jobs, probably in Brisbane, including a stint as a wharfie, and as a hansom-cab driver (a horse-drawn taxi). Fred and Sam (about 10 years older) courted sisters from New Farm on the banks of the Brisbane River. On the 4<sup>th</sup> February 1914, Alice Dean married Fred Robinson, while Georgina Dean married Sam Baillie at a double wedding at St Michael and All Angels, Church of England in Brunswick Street, New Farm (family member, pers. comm., 14.1.2004).

### **Fred's First Family**

Fred and Alice, probably after a time living at or near the Dean family home in New Farm, were able to obtain a loan to secure a property at Camp Flat near Bli Bli on the Maroochy River. The two-storey home built by Fred, a picture of which I sighted courtesy of one of Fred's grandchildren, was a substantial structure. The property was in a picturesque location with Mt. Coolum in the distance.<sup>98</sup>

A picture of Fred and Sam Baillie, both carrying rifles, in front of the Camp Flat sugar cane field, parallels his words: 'I had succeeded in making a sugar farm out of standing timber, and I didn't even know how to sharpen an axe when I started' (Fred Robinson, in *Earth Garden* 1972, p. 33). At this point Fred had his *family-act* together, and was fully engaged in becoming a successful farmer. Over the following fifteen or so years, Mrs Alice Robinson bore six children, while Mr Fred Robinson became a respected part

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<sup>98</sup> When I went to visit this farm in 2004, the owner Ron Clarkeson, after listening to my story for thirty seconds, interrupted me with a quizzical look in his eye asking, 'Do you know Alan Carthew?' Having a vague feeling I had met this man before, I said 'He was my father.' Clarkeson's wife Val was a first cousin of father, and I had met them briefly at my father's funeral a couple of years earlier. This sort of synchronicity reminds me of Fred's belief that *there is no such thing as a coincidence*.

of the cultural milieu of his time and place. During this period he was apparently a good family man.

Fred achieved notoriety for his underwater swimming feats in the Maroochy River, telling me he was the Underwater Swimming Champion of Queensland. Certainly, those I have met who were child witnesses vividly remember Fred's underwater exhibitions. Apparently the tense hush, as the picnic party waited a couple of minutes for Fred to surface from the muddy waters of the Maroochy River, was followed by ecstatic and tumultuous applause when he bobbed up smiling. The son of Arthur Elliot, a family friend at the time, corroborated Fred's stories about the pioneering of the Camp Flat property, cutting down the virgin timber and turning the land into a successful sugar farm – and his underwater swimming prowess.

I saw Fred doing his stunts in the Maroochy River next to the store, which was on the river in those days. He used to float face down on the top of the water and all of a sudden he would sink like a stone and lie on the bottom for what seemed like minutes. He had a partner in this; his name was Venning, and they used to put on shows just for a bit of entertainment. I thought it was amazing and I was dumbfounded watching ... thinking, 'when is he going to come up?' It was quite eerie really (Keith Elliot, telephone conversation, 16.1.2004)<sup>99</sup>

Whether Fred was breathing through a reed straw, or spent part of this time under the pier or in the reeds at the edge of the river, is still a moot point with family members. Whatever the truth of the matter, it is clear that Fred Robinson, even as a sugar farmer and well before his religious awakening, was becoming a colourful and charismatic character. Two of Fred's nieces agreed that 'Fred was a strong character with a presence about him. He had a penetrating look that could pierce right through you. I think we were all a bit in awe of him' (family member, pers. comm., 14.1.2004).

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<sup>99</sup> In the *Houdini era*, such feats as this added to the mystique of a person.



## Part 2: Fred the Social Credit Conspiracy Theorist

The Wall Street collapse of October 1929 and the ensuing Great Depression abruptly changed the lives of the Robinson family, as it did with most Australians. It must have been hard to fathom how Wall Street could upset life on the idyllic Maroochy River.<sup>100</sup>

As Fred told the story to me and numerous others:

*Being devastated by the imminent prospect of the loss of my family home and sugar farm, I conceived a plan that involved my own suicide. It was to be made to look like an accident so that my wife could collect on the life insurance. My rifle was to go off while climbing the fence (Fred Robinson, pers. comm., 1971).*

Before Fred could execute this plan, he heard about a new economic movement which was to literally save his life and give him new meaning and direction. He soon became an active member and later a local spokesperson for Major Douglas's Social Credit Movement, an offshoot and political application of Keynesian economic theory.<sup>101</sup> This movement was to shape Fred's future attitude to money and to inculcate in him a powerful belief in a world-wide financial conspiracy, a teaching he incorporated into his schema for life. As he was approaching forty Fred was *shot out of the rat race* – and he soon wanted others to hear why. I remember being dumfounded at Fred's audacity when he told me of his early experience of what he called *the sharing of truth*:

*Once I had a grasp of what was wrong with the money system, and why ignorant people (like I had been) had lost their farms, I wanted to tell everyone. I stood up at a local church after the Minister had delivered an innocent prayer about the Depression. I briefly told them that all their prayers wouldn't help. I explained that it was a world-wide conspiracy – but they wanted me to sit down and shut up. Not many people want to hear the truth Stephen (Fred Robinson, pers. comm., 1971).*

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<sup>100</sup> Australia's extreme dependence on agricultural and industrial exports meant it was, during the Great Depression, one of the hardest-hit countries in the Western world ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great\\_Depression#Australia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Depression#Australia), accessed 2.6.2010).

<sup>101</sup> The policy proposals of Social Credit attracted widespread interest in the decades between the world wars of the twentieth century because of their relevance to economic conditions of the time. Douglas called attention to the excess of production capacity over consumer purchasing power, an observation that was also made by John Maynard Keynes in his book, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936). While Douglas predated and shared some of Keynes' criticisms of the monetary and banking systems, his unique remedies were disputed and even rejected by most economists and bankers of the time. Remnants of Social Credit still exist, but not in the purest form originally advanced by Major C. H. Douglas ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_Credit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Credit), accessed 7.7.2010). Douglas Social Credit has achieved some degree of political representation in Governments across the world, especially in those surviving agricultural economies, including Canada and New Zealand ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_Credit#Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Credit#Canada), accessed 22.9.2010).

Even back in the early 1930s Fred saw it as his duty to *make the truth available* to others. This was a theme he took up for the rest of his life – and occasionally he was able to encourage others to do likewise. It was during this period of organising Douglas Credit Meetings that Fred first spoke publicly, and at length, about the issue he so passionately espoused:

*We were gathered around a tree waiting for the guest speaker to arrive when someone yelled 'You speak Fred, you know all about it'. When I stood up on the box to speak I had no idea of what I was going to say. Then I saw in my mind the first words written up in front of me as clear as day. I was away. I know now that it was the spirit flowing through me. I once tried to do it with notes and it was a miserable failure, so I threw them away – I have never used notes since, except when reading a quote (Fred Robinson, pers. comm., 1970s)*

The following is a condensation of a relevant section of the question and answer feature article, 'Honey is Money' (1972, pp. 32–35); a verbatim interview between the editor of *Earth Garden* and Fred Robinson about barter. It reveals how Fred employed his Great Depression life experiences to influence his countercultural audience of the 1970s. Fred's rhetoric about *the imminent collapse of the economy* was one of the most appealing elements of his message to my generation. Writing this thesis in the aftermath of the 2007 American sub-prime lending crisis, it is hard not to wonder if some of Fred's story may still have currency.

## Honey is Money

[The nature of the conversational taped interview meant that there were speech falters that demanded ellipses within the text. These appear without a space; where I have used an ellipse to remove tangential text I have used spaces before and after the ellipse and started the next chunk with a new paragraph].

**Earth Garden:** *Were you always a practical sort of person?*

**Fred Robinson:** ... I had succeeded in making a sugar farm out of standing [jungle]...in twenty years I had made a good farm...and then, fortunately, I was shot out of the rat race...as most people are going to be now...and, after I'd got over the idea of suicide...did you know that bankruptcy figures and statistics and suicide figures go hand in hand? ...

... suddenly it was all gone. Out of a farm that they valued at a good many thousands of pounds, I rescued seventy five pounds. And that started my eldest son...he was

only 14 then – I had six children...and he passed a remark that he would very much like to keep bees. Now I am strongly recommending, after my experiences, to all the young people wanting to go on communities and fraternities, *strongly recommending*, if they're in bee country, to start bees going, and they'll work like mad for the community ...

... the human race could learn many things from the behaviour of the bee. As a community, they won't tolerate loafers, they won't tolerate them at all. We could learn much from them. Well my eldest boy, he had a great love for bees, and it turned

out that, in my belief, my experience, honey is the very best basis for barter that you could wish for. It's every bit as good as money. It's imperishable. If you've got a surplus production of fruit or vegetables or anything like that you must get rid of it quick. It won't last. But honey...once my children had all the honey they could possibly eat, we used to store it up and barter it as the opportunity arose. I've been bartering for 35 years now ...

... and I'll tell you what I discovered...you bring about a spirit which is the exact opposite of the commercial world. When you are buying something, everybody's out for a bargain for themselves, when you're bartering, everybody's out to...well in my experience...everybody's out to see you get a bargain.

**Earth Garden:** *It sets off a chain reaction?*

**Fred Robinson:** It does, it brings out the very best in human nature, instead of the worst ...

... You've really got to experience this to get the very opposite of what we're accustomed to in the world. The whole of this money system is a satanic thing. It isn't of God, it isn't of Nature, it doesn't belong...God hasn't got a money system. Everything is free, there's that wonderful sunshine out there. Compare that sunshine with this light and try to imagine how much money it would cost the world if they'd cornered the sun and were putting it through a meter, and the world had to pay daily for the sunshine and the power.

**Earth Garden:** *They probably would if they could.*

**Fred Robinson:** They would if they could, but then the people wouldn't have enough money to pay for what it's worth. And so with the fresh air, we'd die without it, and yet it was kept perfectly balanced for millions of years, nearly 500 million years. The atmosphere has been totally balanced until quite recently.

A few very clever men, who think they can run this planet better than God can, they upset the whole balance of everything just in a few years ...

... at this stage we weren't farming. I wasn't a vegetarian either. I'll tell you exactly what happened at that stage. We got 75 hives of bees going. We used to catch fish down on the lake, the children did anyhow. We didn't know enough to be vegetarians at that time, and, with the two days a week on the relief work I had...eight shillings a day...sixteen shillings a week...that kept us going right through the piece until...I'll tell you what happened really happened...I set to work five days a week with nothing to do once the boy got going with the bees...I built a house that cost us five pounds in cash, and I was released an acre of ground that cost us five shillings a year to rent.

See, these young people say, oh, we've got no money, and we've got no land. It's the wrong spirit to approach the thing in. Your needs will be met if your motives are right. One way or another you will attract what you need. Well, quite innocently and without any knowing of what I was doing I was attracting what we needed...which is very, very different from what people want. It's quite simple for you to get your needs. In the very near future this will be the salvation of those people who can understand it. If you can simplify your needs. I am a very wealthy man but I have got no money. All my needs are met. But what I did, as soon as the boy had the bees going, and I'd finished this two-day-a-week relief work I was flat out then finding out what was wrong. My every thought was concentrated on finding out what was wrong, why do people go bankrupt? Why do people suffer all this sort of thing? And in a relatively short time I found out exactly what was wrong with your economy, and why it cannot possibly function without war...

... And by 1936...I wasn't in the practical stuff then at all...I was finding out what was wrong...I went straight out of the world altogether for twenty years

(Fred Robinson 1972, *Earth Garden*, pp. 33–34).

The above text tells us something about the Universal Brotherhood's experience too; especially Fred's references to direct barter instead of money.<sup>102</sup> In the 1970s and '80s members of the Community received astounding proof of the value of barter. While recognising its limitations, the goodwill engendered – *where everyone is out to see you get a bargain* – was borne out.

Before recounting Fred's break from his family, and exploring his *twenty years out of the world*, it is worthwhile examining the Douglas Credit or Social Credit Movement of the early 1930s, particularly the conspiracy theory that it then endorsed. Fred's essential platform regarding *the truth about the economy* was to considerably influence his receptive 1970s audience, and was the major reason for his decision to eschew *working for money* as opposed to *working for a living* – a distinction which won Fred much support amongst alternative countercultural idealists, who found the whole money system and the expected drudgery of the work-a-day world distasteful.

## The Social Credit Movement

Major C.F. Douglas's Social Credit teachings explained to Fred why he was losing his farm. All the emotions engendered through that loss now had a target: *the man-made evil system based on 'usury' - charging your brother interest*, which Fred was convinced was set up by 'a few very clever men, who think they can run the world better than God can' (Fred Robinson, in *Earth Garden* 1972, p. 33).

The general population were, in the eyes of the Social Credit movement of the 1930s, all pawns in a world-wide conspiracy to deny the freedom of the individual. Fred became immersed in these teachings of Douglas whose doctrines suggested that people were unfree, that their resentments were just, and that civilisation had perverted true

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<sup>102</sup> Bartering is a medium in which goods or services are directly exchanged for other goods and/or services without a medium of exchange, such as money. It can be bilateral or multilateral, and usually exists parallel to monetary systems in most developed countries, though to a very limited extent. Barter usually replaces money as the method of exchange in times of monetary crisis, when the currency is unstable and devalued by hyperinflation (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barter>, accessed 5.6.2010). Barter services became popular during The Great Depression in the 1930s, which witnessed a scarcity of money. The barter system was used as a way of obtaining things like food and other services. The trading was done between people or through groups, who acted as agents and facilitated third party bartering. These groups were like banks, where people maintained their accounts. In case of sale of any of the items, the account of the owner would be credited and the account of the buyer would be debited (<http://www.buzzle.com/articles/barter-services-history-of-barter-system.html>, accessed 5.6.2010).

human values. The movement also drew attention to the growing centralisation of power everywhere and pointed to the suppression of individuality which this must entail, arguing that parliamentary democracy had become unreal (McPherson 1949, pp. 378–393).

The Social Credit message of the 1930s also however promulgated a particularly insidious anti-Semitic message. *Social Discredit* by Janine Stingel exposes this previously neglected part of Social Credit history – the anti-Jewish campaign it undertook before, during, and after the Second World War (Stingel 2000, pp. 3–4). The (false) veracity of Social Credit’s source document for its conspiracy theories, *The Protocols of the Meetings of the Learned Elders of Zion* (first published in 1921) was always a vital part of Fred’s world view – underpinning his insistence that we should, in the 1970s *get out from under Lucifer’s control and create a little piece of heaven on earth, where everyone can sit under his own vine and his own fig tree and none shall make them afraid*.<sup>103</sup> Here the bolding, my own, replicates Fred’s raised voice as he made his powerful point. His you-can-hear-a-pin-drop-audiences were persuaded that by being part of the prevailing socio-economic system they were *all being controlled by the Illuminati* – some forty years after Fred himself was taken in by this fraudulent document.

While admitting for instance that Adolf Hitler had become drunk with power, Fred’s open appreciation of some of Hitler’s early policies was always problematic for New Age baby-boomers. However, the information Fred supplied about Hitler’s use of international barter sounded very plausible – especially if there was an apolitical world-wide conspiracy playing one country off against another. Historically, Hitler did successfully circumvent the international banking system during Germany’s 1930s economic recovery. Fred’s argument however was the same as that still espoused by anti-Semitic authors:

In this economic recovery, Hitler hit upon something which helped to arouse the everlasting hatred of the international banking community: instead of basing Germany’s recovery on enormous loans from foreign and local banks, Hitler based the German

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<sup>103</sup> The Biblical quote Fred employs reads: ‘But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it’ (Micah 4:4). In his paraphrasing, Fred inserts the word ‘own’ after ‘vine’ and after ‘fig tree’ to emphasise the way personal property can be taken by those who try to ‘make them afraid’.

economy onto a barter system, by which he could get much of what he needed by exchanging German surplus for the surplus of other countries – in common language, by swapping. The next radical change Hitler brought about was to take the right to print money away from private banking institutions – which he viewed as Jewish – and restored the sole right to print money to the German state itself (Kemp 2006).

Fred's listeners of the 1970s, knowing little about economic systems, accepted much of his line. While we all found the anti-Semitic implications disturbing, Fred assured us that he was personally not anti-Semitic. Like many others I believed him – and accepted his supposedly fully-researched conclusions. After all, he always saw my own Jewish heritage as a plus:

*It is not the individual Jewish person I am talking about Stephen, they are perhaps the most religious and intelligent race in the world. It is just the small group of international financiers who manipulate and control the money system - even to the disadvantage of their own people* (Fred Robinson, pers. comm., 1971).

With an innate feeling for political correctness, we did, in league with the more politically savvy Mary, try to reframe this part of Fred's teaching. We preferred to use more culturally current terms: 'The Multinationals', or the generic catch-phrase 'the Economic Conspiracy'. Fred's own more evocative terms: The Elders of Zion, The Illuminati, or The Black Magicians, were more menacing synonyms for the evil cabal which he believed controlled the world's finances, and as a consequence ... '*each one of you!*'<sup>104</sup> Fred firmly believed, from the 1930s to the day he died, that there was an organised group intently planning a *New World Order out for world domination through their economic system*. The idea is still much alive today. Conspiracy theories are rife, and spread even more efficiently through the internet.

Stephen Jacobs and Mark Weitzman's book, *Dismantling the Big Lie: The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (2003) refutes in detail the claims made in this anti-Semitic forgery which Fred had accepted and passed on to people like me:

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<sup>104</sup> The common theme in conspiracy theories about a New World Order is that a powerful and secretive elite with a globalist agenda is conspiring to eventually rule the world through a totalitarian world government, which would replace sovereign nation-states and put an end to International power struggles. Many world events are speculated to be orchestrated by an extremely influential cabal operating through many front organisations ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New\\_World\\_Order\\_\(conspiracy\\_theory\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_World_Order_(conspiracy_theory)), accessed 7.7.2010).

While other attempts have been made to explore the history or context of *The Protocols*, this work sets out the themes and claims of each of the 24 protocols, and then offers, protocol by protocol, a detailed refutation. Since the protocols claim to be exposing a hidden conspiracy rooted in Jewish tradition, the refutation is accomplished by showing how authentic Jewish texts and authorities have actually addressed the themes that the protocols speak about. The positions cited are drawn from the range of Jewish history and traditions. There are also chapters that explore current use of the protocols by modern extremists, as well as the new life given to them by the internet (Dickerson 2003).

Since Fred died there have been a number of well-researched papers and books that detail evidence of this disastrous forgery. Jacobs and Weitzman explore the tragic influence of this book on Adolf Hitler, who used it in his Nazi propaganda. Today however *The Protocols* has found a new readership, being a popular paperback in Arab countries.

### **The Effect of *The Protocols* on Fred**

Beside Fred's gullibility in accepting the hoax of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the intensity of feeling Fred had towards the *International Bankers*, who Fred believed had masterminded the First World War, the Great Depression, and the Second World War, influenced him to act in ways that seem incommensurable with his previous character:

Yes, I think Fred was a good man up until he left his family, and I think they had good times ... Fred was a smart sort of person and Alice was very pleasant woman to talk with (Keith Elliot, telephone conversation, 16.1.2004).

The emotional power unleashed as a result of Fred's conspiracy convictions exacerbated his feelings about the loss of the family farm. The blame and anger he then projected onto *the Illuminati* seem to have acted as a poison that was to pollute his emotional blood stream for the rest of his life. There was, with all Fred's undoubted love, compassion and warmth, an underlying bitterness and resentment towards *this Black Brotherhood of Bankers*, which drove him to encourage others to *get out of the world* and away from their influence. At times, and especially in front of an audience, Fred could become a proud, even self-righteous 'other'. His often repeated statement: '*I haven't worked for money for forty years!*' was almost a boast that he had got out from under the influence of the money system which he saw as a 'satanic thing'

(Robinson 1972, *Earth Garden*, p.33). He was never to have a mortgage again – and strongly recommended against borrowing of any kind for the rest of his life.

No one in the Universal Brotherhood had a mortgage. Following Fred's early example, and without the ability to borrow, the UBI housing tended to be basic. However it was also innovative and eco-friendly – and that fitted well with predilections of countercultural back-to-the-land baby-boomers who had no truck with banks anyway. Lived sayings like 'make do with what you have', 'live within your means', and 'necessity is the mother of invention' replaced the practice of formal borrowing. Many of the Members did receive gifts or borrowed without interest from their parents, who wanted to see their children (and grandchildren) availed of more amenities than their chosen pioneering life style afforded.

### **Living on Lake Weyba**

Fred Robinson's family were certainly not supportive of his response to the Great Depression. In interviews with his grandchildren, and with friends of the family, it is clear that they felt his intense research into 'why people suffer' brought large doses of suffering to his own family, for it entailed the devoting of all his spare time to his obsessive quest. It contributed to what they believed was an unnecessary decline in their standard of living, above and beyond the social and financial challenges of the Great Depression. Fred's grandchildren report that Fred was seen by his children as a neglectful and irresponsible father – and a heartbreaker to their mother Alice, who never married again, apparently wearing Fred's ring till the day she died at the age of 80 in 1970.

The cost of Fred's intense period of research was the time lost with his children, and supporting his wife in the raising of a family of six. As Fred said in *Earth Garden* in 1972 'My every thought was concentrated on finding out what was wrong, why do people go bankrupt? Why do people suffer this sort of thing' (p. 33). The strain of Fred's obsessive research was evidently wearing on Alice and the older children, who had to handle the day to day running of his five-pound-house made of one layer of hessian bags dipped in cement slurry, and without adequate amenities. Certainly Fred's



recollections of this time at Lake Weyba bartering *honey for money* were not shared by his family, for whom it has become an awful memory.

However, when the Aquarian *counterculturalists* of the early 1970s heard Fred's romanticised accounts in his lectures or read them in *Earth Garden*, they felt inspired and empowered to do something similar. We were all too willing to go bush with some friends in a back-to-the-land commune, or check out 'Fred's place', as it was often called by my politically incorrect peers. For many, Fred was someone who had successfully quit the world and become happy and healthy. That, in a nutshell, was seen as the major part of his message. The first edition of *Earth Garden* (4.2.1972) featuring Fred's 'Honey is Money' maxim and a full page picture of him, was a stroke of alternative media genius. It sold magazines, while making Fred an instantly loved identity within the alternative back-to-the-land-movement. The very idea of bartering honey instead of earning money was emblematic of an alternative way of life.

While Fred's surviving children all seem to detest their father, they did keep in touch with the Robinson family in Cumberland. Fred's brother, Sydney, visited at least once during this period, for he was photographed on the beach at Mooloolaba with an extremely bronzed Fred. Later events may have coloured this Lake Weyba period into a darker experience than it may actually have been. The children naturally enough sided with their overburdened mother; however it is also clear that Fred himself employed colourful exaggeration and a breathtaking oversimplification of his life during this period. Fred's recollections certainly fail to adequately acknowledge the hardship he brought upon his family.

While Fred extolled balance and moderation as key qualities in his lectures to my generation – *the only thing you can have too much of is moderation* – his lifestyle decisions were seen by his first family as fanatical, reckless, cruel and highly irresponsible. Dedication to a cause often leads to abrupt changes that are hard for others to comprehend. Perhaps it is part of being a religious or cultural innovator, that those closest to such intense *catalysts* or *change agents* are often casualties.

The physical challenges of losing their home, the Spartan life at Lake Weyba, and Fred's preoccupation with his study of the Social Credit movement, were however to prove nothing but a '*preliminary canter*'<sup>105</sup> compared with the psychological angst his family was to endure during Fred's gradual conversion to an arcane NRM Community.

### **Part 3: 'Brother Fred' the Celibate Naturist Neophyte**

Fred took all he knew from Social Credit, which he believed had the economic answers, and began searching for spiritual answers. His life changed dramatically when he met the founders of a new religious movement the Rosicrucian Order of the Aquarians (ROTA).<sup>106</sup> These religious naturists believed themselves to be forerunners of a new dispensation: the Aquarian Age.

#### **The Rosicrucian Order of the Aquarians (1927–1951)**

Fred's fervour for asking 'Why?' which led to his embrace of *the truth* of Social Credit, was soon to ignite his desire for truth in the religious domain: *Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock and the door of truth shall be opened unto you.*<sup>107</sup> Fred tried to live by this verse, and tried to make it live for his eager listeners in the 1970s.

The following account of Fred's conversion period, witnessed by a teenager present at the time, tells the story of what happened to Fred Robinson, a once respected family friend and a much appreciated member of the local community. Both the intensity of Fred's own *catalysation*, and the resistance of this witness/research participant to

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<sup>105</sup> The term '*preliminary canter*' was one of Fred's favourite tropes for the difference between the Great Depression and the '*main race*' – the next mega-depression, which he believed would '*hit the world's economy by 1978 at the very latest*' (Fred Robinson, lectures 1970s).

<sup>106</sup> I will use this umbrella acronym ROTA when referring to the raft of organisations started and abandoned by the leaders of this group. A plethora of appellations came under this umbrella organisation, including a range of businesses and educational institutions.

<sup>107</sup> Mathew 7:7 (KJV) only says: 'knock and *it* shall be opened unto you'. Fred's insertion of the phrase 'the door of truth', more clearly explained this 'it', and suggests his listeners had already *asked* and *sought*, and were now in the process of *knocking on truth's door* – which would be opened to them.

religious ‘cults’, has resonance with the family crises brought about when Fred first *catalysed* some of my own generation in the 1970s:

My parents were involved in everything that went on. Fred would come over and would bring his books and they would discuss things. I know because I remember him coming to our house and having arguments with my dad – mainly about that Rosicrucian business. It all happened over a twelve to eighteen month period around 1936. We’d be in the background listening. I can’t remember any of the conversations, but they were arguing about Rosicrucian stuff.

To start with it was the Social Credit thing that Fred became involved with, but it was the Rosicrucian religious thing that got him in the end – that cult thing which took him away from his family. My father, who was buying Fred’s place, tried to talk Fred out of sinking every penny from its sale into that Rosicrucian Order. Then he walked off and left them penniless. Religion got him. It happens today with all that Americanised stuff and the gurus – leeches on the country! (Keith Elliot, telephone conversation, 16.1.2004).

Gymnosophy, an arcane word meaning spiritual naturism, was the doctrine of this Rosicrucian sect. It was the most distasteful dimension of Fred’s conversion for his wife, her family and their neighbourhood friends in Bli Bli during the mid-1930s; and no doubt to his mother and family back in England. With all Fred’s spiritual reasoning, in the eyes of his family, friends, and associates Fred had simply become a nudist deserter.

Before continuing with Fred’s personal story as it intertwined with the history of ROTA, it is helpful to explore some of the cultural issues around nudism, to contextualise Fred’s involvement then, and to note the resonance it had to the later countercultural nudists of the 1970s.

## **Nudism and Gymnosophy in England and Australia**

Nudism was seen as a progressive movement in England from the mid-1920s. The first nudist club was established in 1924, the same year as the first Labour government and the same year in which Douglas published his influential book *Social Credit*, with its suggestion of the complete reform of the monetary system. In 1923 another socially influential book had been published in English: Dr. Augustine Rollier’s *Heliotherapy* advocated the health benefits of nude sunbathing. Bernard Shaw, and such prominent socialists as H.G. Wells and Havelock Ellis were openly sympathetic to nudism, while by May of 1924 the health benefits of air and sun baths had become so widely

recognised that the inaugural meeting of the Sunshine League had attracted Alexandra, the Queen Mother, as its first patron, while over a hundred of Britain's most distinguished citizens had been coopted to act as an advisory council for the movement – among them Asquith, Lloyd George, the Earl of Oxford and Julian Huxley (Carr-Gomm 2010, pp. 159–160).

While the nudist movement strove for health conscious respectability – content to swim and sunbathe with family and friends – one of the early proponents, Captain H. H. Vincent believed that nudists should follow the course of militant action which had been so successful for the suffragettes who won the franchise for woman in 1919. His suggestion of nude protest marches through Hyde Park revealed that the threat of a naked protest was enough to generate publicity: In January 1925 *The People* was to run the headline '*SUN BATHERS WANT TO STARTLE LONDON – PROPOSED HYDE PARK MARCH OF 2000 NAKED MEN AND WOMEN*'. The records of the time 'reveals not only the gap between the vision and any attempt to enact it, but also the degree of prudery that existed' (Carr-Gomm 2010, p. 160). Vincent, a lone voice crying for the right to be naked in public, was eventually arrested in 1927 for being bare-chested in Hyde Park; however, less ambitious English nudists were developing a substantial following, describing themselves as 'sunbathers' or as 'gymnosophists'.<sup>108</sup>

The same year Vincent was arrested, with all its attendant publicity, the American sociologist Maurice Parmelee published *the New Gymnosophy* (1927), 'the first book in English to present nakedness as a way of life' (Carr-Gomm 2010, p. 161) with the introduction written by Havelock Ellis.<sup>109</sup> While Ellis was unprepared to join gymnosophical societies, he encouraged the practice of nakedness amongst personal friends on hygienic, moral, or aesthetic grounds (ibid., p. 161). By 1933 Dr. Rollier's success with tuberculosis patients had achieved worldwide recognition; a school in

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<sup>108</sup> From the Greek *gymnos* (naked) and *sophia* (wisdom). This euphemism 'had the additional benefit of conferring classical dignity on the activity, and of suggesting that nudist were naked for philosophical reasons' (Carr-Gomm 2010, p. 161). This is certainly how Fred presented his position to me – but it was not how Mary saw it; to her Nudism, Naturism and Gymnosophy were anathema.

<sup>109</sup> Havelock Ellis (1859 – 1939) was a British physician, psychologist, writer, and social reformer who studied human sexuality. He was co-author of the first medical textbook in English on homosexuality in 1897, and also published works on a variety of sexual practices and inclinations, including transgender psychology. He is credited with introducing the notions of narcissism and autoeroticism, later adopted by psychoanalysis ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Havelock\\_Ellis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Havelock_Ellis), accessed 7.8.2011).

Sussex offered boarding facilities to boys and girls from 3 to 12 where the children ran about naked, having up to three or four hours sun exposure daily. An article ‘The Unpleasantness of Clothes’ appeared in the 1933 *Sun Bathing Review* with a letter from George Bernard Shaw to the society’s secretary. By the mid-1930s nakedness (out of the general public’s gaze) had reached the height of its popularity (Carr-Gomm 20110, pp.160–163).

It is important now to examine how nudism/naturism/gymnosophy developed in Australia during the 1930s. While there were some practising nudists in Australia ‘very few Australians in 1937 even knew that nudism existed, and if they had, still fewer would have known that white Australians *could* become nudists’ (Clarke 1982, p.180). It was clear that organised Nudism would develop more slowly in the antipodes than in Europe:

The practice of nudity for the majority of Australians was a more complicated social development than for their European cousins. Nakedness was an attribute which was attached to Aborigines and, as colonists, what distinguished white men from black men – beyond skin colour – was clothing ... white and clothed meant civilisation whilst black and naked meant savage, if not animal. Whilst philanthropic social efforts could be made to raise the Aborigines by clothing them – a policy adopted worldwide – the reverse could never apply. White men could not take off their clothes and remain civilised ... when in the late 1920s, the idea of nudism was imported to Australia it naturally faced more opposition than could have been the case in Europe. Nudism, in Europe, was treated as more of a joke than anything else but in Australia it threatened the entire social order, one based on the supremacy of the white man and identified as much as anything by the absence or presence of clothing (Clarke 1982, pp. 180–181).

Interestingly, the post-colonial ‘hippie’ sub-culture that Fred spoke to in the 1970s found the *colonial-divesting* nudist dimension of the post *Hair* period highly attractive.<sup>110</sup> Had Fred still been a practising gymnosophist he would have been an even bigger hit – a perfect fit. By then however he had shed this particular garment of ‘truth’ to don the caftan of modesty. However, nudity was not the flavour of the decade in 1930s Australia, however popular it was becoming in England and Europe:

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<sup>110</sup> 1968, ‘The Year of Revolutions’, with the Prague Spring and the Paris Riots, along with the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, also saw the opening of the musical *Hair* on Broadway. *Hair* opened in Australia in June 1969, and contributed to nudism becoming a big part of the hippie culture – a rejection of the sexual repression, a statement about naturalism, spirituality, honesty, openness, and freedom (Miller 2001). John Lennon and Yoko Ono also released the experimental album *Two Virgins* with a nude cover ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline\\_of\\_non-sexual\\_social\\_nudity#cite\\_note-12](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_non-sexual_social_nudity#cite_note-12), accessed 8.8.2011).

The dilemma of the nudist, faced with hostility, was to decide whether publicity or further secrecy would best advance their cause. Secrecy meant, especially in the early years, limited freedom from criticism and ridicule but, most importantly, it could actually mean the difference between continuation of a club or termination. The 1930s was an era when moral outrage was extended over high fences and nudists lived in fear of prosecution, even when on a private well-screened property (Clark 1982, p. 177).

Fred's close association with the 'pioneering' of naturism in Australia is counterpointed later in his life when, with Mary in control of the policies, the Universal Brotherhood was public in its condemnation of the practice. As UBI spokesperson I wrote a seventeen page treatise on it entitled *Nudism: The Bare Reality* (1979) – a totally un-researched exposé. Interestingly however, the anti-materialist hippies of the early 1970s were much more attuned to the stance of the Naturist Clubs of the 1930s than they were to the 1970s Nudist clubs in Australia:

Early Australian nudist philosophy advocated simplicity in all things; it was 'anti-materialistic', while in the 1970s Australian nudism progressively abandoned the concept of anti-materialism. Clubs sought not simple bush retreats but competed with each other to build gigantic swimming pools, saunas, tennis courts and club houses. Their members expressed wealth in what they could transport to the clubs: cars, tents, caravans, barbeques and portable fridges. The concept of mateship – which also meant equality – was somewhat debased in the rush to display affluence. Even the nude itself became the adorned nude: women began to wear gold ankle and waist chains, men small gold bars around their neck and expensive watches on their wrists. Anti-materialism was forgotten (Clark 1982, p. 74).

The countercultural youth of the early 1970s were to bring nudism back to their anti-materialistic grass roots – and out into the open. They revelled in taking nudism into the mainstream. The following extract from an anonymous contributor to *The Australian Sunbather* could easily have been written by one of the ready-and-waiting countercultural 'hippies' listening to Fred in 1971, or perhaps by a 'feral' of the 1990s – or a devotee of the sustainability movement of the twenty-first century:

Happiness does not depend on material possessions ... constantly reaching out for something beyond your grasp tends to bring discontent rather than happiness ... use and enjoy what you have ... Happiness ... emanates largely from mental qualities of contentment, confidence and serenity (*The Australian Sunbather*, no. 30, May 1949; quoted in Clark 1982, p. 74).

The cultural context of nudity in Australia during the time of Fred's conversion crisis in 1935–36, also says something of the influence of that era on the man who inspired the occult order Fred joined. In the late nineteenth-century a man who 'contacted' the

‘Elder Brothers’ inspired a Rosicrucian sect, The Order of the Rose Cross. The teachings of this man, Max Heindel, were to be passed on to Fred’s audiences in the 1970s – interestingly, without being attributed.<sup>111</sup>

## **Max Heindel, the Rosicrucians and Fred Robinson**

Max Heindel is believed by his present day followers, and biographer/hagiographer Charles Webber, to be ‘the greatest Western Mystic of the twentieth century’ (Webber, 2008).<sup>112</sup> Heindel was born in Aarhus, Denmark as Carl Louis Fredrik Grasshoff, on Sunday morning the 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1865. ‘Life at home did not satisfy Carl, so at nineteen he left the family home and sailed to Glasgow finding a job as a master tobacconist. At twenty he met and married the sixteen year old Catherine Dorothy Luetjens Wallace’ (ibid.). It was about this time that Carl read a poem/prayer in the periodical *London Light* which deeply impressed him. The author, Florence May Holbrook (1860–1932), was an earnest pacifist, who sailed on Henry Ford’s *Peace Ship* to Europe in 1916. She went on to urge Americans to use the word ‘peace’ instead of ‘hello’ or ‘howdy’. Her poem, ‘A Prayer’ uncannily portrays Fred and Mary Robinson’s philosophy, put to us in slightly more modern language in the 1970s, while also suggesting that forgotten voices are recycled well into the future.

Not more of light I ask, O God,  
But eyes to see what is:  
Not sweeter songs, but ears to hear  
The present melodies.

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<sup>111</sup> Eighteenth-century German mystic, Karl von Eckarsthausen, describes the true Adepts of the Rose Cross in the following terms:

These sages, whose number is small, are children of light, and are opposed to darkness. They dislike mystification and secrecy; they are open and frank, have nothing to do with secret societies and with external ceremonies...

In the early twentieth-century, Max Heindel, a Rosicrucian Initiate, emphasises that the roots of the Brothers of the Rose Cross are almost impossible to be traced as ‘theirs is a work which aims to encourage the evolution of humanity, they have laboured far back into antiquity – under one guise or another’ ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosy\\_Cross](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosy_Cross), accessed 7.7.2010). The Rosicrucian Fellowship – ‘An International Association of Christian Mystics’ – was founded in 1909 by Max Heindel as herald of the Aquarian Age and with the aim of publicly promulgating the true Rosicrucian Philosophy ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Rosicrucian\\_Fellowship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Rosicrucian_Fellowship), accessed 7.7.2010).

<sup>112</sup> This text is a ‘short biography’ of Max Heindel written by a member of the organisation Heindel instituted, it therefore tends towards being a hagiography, but as it is the only biographical source I have been able to find, I have used it ([http://rosicrucianzine.tripod.com/max\\_heindel.htm](http://rosicrucianzine.tripod.com/max_heindel.htm), accessed 22.9.2010).

Not more of strength, but how to use  
 The power that I possess:  
 Not more of love, but skill to turn  
 A frown to a caress.

Not more of joy, but how to feel  
 Its kindling presence near,  
 To give to others all I have  
 Of courage and of cheer.

No other gifts, dear God, I ask,  
 But only sense to see  
 How best these precious gifts to use  
 Thou hast bestowed on me

(First four stanzas, of 'The Prayer' by Florence May Holbrook, in Webber 2008, [http://rosicrucianzine.tripod.com/max\\_heindel.htm](http://rosicrucianzine.tripod.com/max_heindel.htm), accessed 22.9.2010).<sup>113</sup>

By following the *textrail* back to these *pre-Fred* voices, then following them forward to the Universal Brotherhood in the 1970s, we can confirm Bakhtin's claim that *to be means to communicate dialogically* (Bakhtin 1984, pp. 303–304). In this case these are dialogues conducted across time: '... our dialogues are therefore not only backward-looking (to other people whose words we are using and reacting to) but also forward looking, (to future responses that we expect or desire)' (Pope 2001, p. 235). The way in which Fred's past teachers' voices found their way to my generation calls forward the study of *Intertextuality*:

... the shaping of texts' meanings by other texts. It can refer to an author's borrowing and transformation of a prior text or to a reader's referencing of one text in reading another. The term 'intertextuality' has, itself, been borrowed and transformed many times since it was coined by Bulgarian poststructuralist Julia Kristeva in 1966. As critic William Irwin says, the term 'has come to have almost as many meanings as users from those faithful to Kristeva's original vision to those who simply use it as a stylish way of talking about allusion and influence' (Irwin 2004, p. 228) ... While the theoretical concept of intertextuality is associated with postmodernism the device itself is not new. New Testament passages quoted from the Old Testament and Old Testament books such as Deuteronomy or the Prophets refer to the events described in Exodus (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intertextuality>, accessed 22.9.2010).

Carl Grasshoff and his wife Cathy had returned to Copenhagen, having parented four children, however 'the marriage relationship was such that Carl and his wife decided to separate' (Webber 2008). Grasshoff migrated to America, probably about 1896, 'to

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<sup>113</sup> The resonance with the 1970s popular American poet Helen Steiner-Rice is worth noting, especially as Rice was a favourite poet of the Robinsons.



build himself a new future' (ibid.).<sup>114</sup> Changing his name to Max Heindel he found work as an engineer at a brewery in the Boston district, moving in 1903 to try his fortune in the *El Dorado* of California. Here he had a difficult time but 'with a dauntless spirit' he was determined to succeed. Here he became interested in metaphysics: 'the light began to dawn when he contacted the teachings given out by Madame Blavatsky'. Joining the Theosophical Society he was the vice-president of the Los Angeles branch in 1904 and 1905. Through this society he met Augusta Foss

... who was instrumental in interesting Max Heindel in the science of Astrology ... truly a science of the soul ... the key by which he could unlock the mysteries of man's inner nature. By learning to know and understand the weaknesses of character he could then help to guide and help them to find their proper place in the world (Webber 2008, [http://rosicrucianzine.tripod.com/max\\_heindel.htm](http://rosicrucianzine.tripod.com/max_heindel.htm), accessed 22.9.2010).

Like many religious/spiritual teachers before and after him, Heindel felt the need to assuage man's 'soul hunger'. In 1907, after a testing period of disappointment, an 'Elder Brother' of the Rosicrucian Order visited him 'clothed in his vital body' and offering to impart teachings – as long as he promised not to divulge them. When Heindel refused to accept anything which he could not pass on to the world the teacher left him, but returned to announce that Max had passed the test, ordering him to give the teachings to the public by the end of December 1909 (ibid.).

## **Spiritual Tests**

There are a number of issues in Heindel's story that subsequently played out in the Universal Brotherhood. The idea of 'tests' is one used by religious groups the world over.<sup>115</sup> The concept is clearly open to abuse. Any mistake or bizarre suggestion by a human leader or teacher, or 'Spirit', 'Angel', or 'Elder Brother', can always be reframed as 'a test'. Fred was given to thinking of his decision to leave his family as a 'test' of his faith in his own 'calling'.

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<sup>114</sup> Fred must have known Heindel's personal history. It is not unreasonable to surmise that Fred was influenced by Heindel's example of how 'to build himself a new future'.

<sup>115</sup> One of the most important understandings of the entire Spiritual Path is the understanding that Earth is a Planetary Mystery School, and that every single thing that happens in life is a Spiritual Test. Planet Earth is a Spiritual School to teach Souls to become '*Integrated Ascended Masters and/or God Realised Beings*'. Every single thing that happens in life is a teaching, lesson, challenge, and opportunity to grow ([http://www.spiritual.com.au/articles/ascension/spiritualtests\\_jdstone.htm](http://www.spiritual.com.au/articles/ascension/spiritualtests_jdstone.htm), accessed 3.6.2010).

Secondly, the idea of being constantly ‘observed’ by ‘Elder Brothers or Sisters’ gauging ones ‘fitness’ to undertake a given ‘higher task’ can, without much difficulty, be used as a control mechanism. Such ‘spiritual beings’ (or ‘hallucinations’ appearing to be ‘Higher Beings’) may not be as benevolent and wise as they say they are. While such notions as these are flaky stuff to the *outsider*, to an *insider* within a wholly dedicated hot-house environment they can be very real.

Thirdly, the idea of ‘fitness’ referred to in one of Fred’s favourite Bible verses is also recalled in Heindel’s story: ‘For many are called but few are chosen’ (Mathew 22:14 KJV). While the idea of being ‘called’ was central in Fred Robinson’s schema, he thought it strange that such a *relatively useless and untrained person* as himself should be ‘chosen’ for such a mammoth task. He argued to us that it was simply because *those more suited to the task* had failed to show up at the ‘wedding feast’ referred to in the parable to which this quotation is attached, and which Fred assumed was a metaphor for the New Age. To Fred the New Age was to be an ‘event’ to which we were all invited, but only those who ‘chose themselves’ by their ‘*unselfish willingness to serve*’ would be ready and fit to attend.

Fourthly, the pressure of getting out the Elder Brother’s message by a certain date, in Heindel’s case the end of December 1909, is a deadline pressure often used in religious groups to make tasks seem super-important, sometimes at a supposed planetary level. If one believes that God, an Angel, an Ascended Master or Elder Brother wants something done by a certain time, and if one also believes they are who they say they are, then another level of spiritual purpose and dedication is attached to the task – and a lot of ‘divine’ pressure to perform is thus applied.

### **The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception**

At what proved to be the last of his Elder Brother interviews Heindel was told how to reach the Temple of the Rose Cross, where he purportedly ‘spent a little over one month in direct communication with and under the personal instructions of the Elder Brothers, who imparted to him the greater part of the teachings contained in the “Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception”’ (Webber 2008). After returning to New York Heindel rewrote the

350 pages of manuscript to suit his American audience. The result was the *Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conceptions* (1909), regarded by the Order as Heindel's *magnum opus*

a masterpiece of mystical literature ... the most comprehensive, simply written, and complete histories of the evolution of the earth and man that has been written for centuries ... and is now translated into eight different languages (Webber 2008 [http://rosicrucianzine.tripod.com/max\\_heindel.htm](http://rosicrucianzine.tripod.com/max_heindel.htm), accessed 22.9.2011).

Evidently Fred Robinson agreed, for he studied it intensely, recycling much of the content in his later lectures during the 1970s – but by then rarely mentioning this foundation text book. Fred had embodied Heindel's teachings, carrying the term 'Elder Brother' into his by-then more developed schema. I only vaguely remember Fred talking about Heindel and *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception: An Elementary Treatise Upon Man's Past Evolution, Present Constitution and Future Development* (1909). It was not until I undertook this research that I discovered where Fred had acquired the term '*The Elder Brothers*', as an alternative to the '*The Space People*'.

In 1910 Heindel married Augusta Foss who had taught him Astrology and 'who had been instrumental in him finding the truth' (Webber 2008). They wrote a number of books about Astrology together, such as *The Message of the Stars* (1927). Since Fred Robinson also learnt Astrology, it is highly likely that he read some of these jointly authored Heindel/Foss Astrology books during the period he followed Heindel's teachings from about 1935. Heindel went on to write over 20 more books, some of them compilations of lectures, with titles such as *How Shall we Know Christ at His Coming ?* (1914), *The Web Of Destiny* (1920), *Gleanings of a Mystic* (1922). The titles alone indicate the particular hybridisation he was producing<sup>116</sup> – and confirm parallel impulses within the subsequent vision of Fred Robinson.

### **Unpacking Heindel's Death Story**

A number of anecdotes from Webber's 'Short Biography of Max Heindel' (2008) reveal issues relevant to Fred and Mary Robinson and the Universal Brotherhood. The following description of Heindel's death is one of these:

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<sup>116</sup> Many of these books are now available for free download on The Rosicrucian Fellowship web site (<http://www.rosicrucianfellowship.org/downloads.htm>, accessed 23.9.2010) or via Wikipedia under Max Heindel ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Max\\_Heindel#Occult\\_writings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Max_Heindel#Occult_writings), accessed 22.9.2010).

After lunch on January 6th, 1919, she [Foss] was called to her office to finish some work in directing the many secretaries. About 4 p.m. Max Heindel, who had drafted a letter to the local Postmistress, brought the letter into Mrs. Heindel's office for her approval, for he would never make any changes or start any new projects unless he consulted his trusted partner. While Mrs. Heindel was reading this letter, Max Heindel, who had been standing by her side, dropped slowly to the carpet; he did not fall heavily as is usually the case but as if loving hands were holding him and laying him down gently.

His last words as he looked up smiling into Mrs. Heindel's face were, 'I am all right dear', and he passed into unconsciousness. With these loving words on his lips he passed into the Great Beyond, where he had through his devotion to God and humanity prepared a great work with the band of 'Invisible Helpers', through which the work of healing is carried on. Is Max Heindel's work finished? No indeed, for the special work in which the Rosicrucian Order is interested is that of the Invisible Helpers – through which a great work of healing is being accomplished – Max Heindel was assured by his Teacher [the 'Elder Brother' assigned to him] that he was the instrument through which a great movement was to be inaugurated, a movement which had a special mission: TO MAKE THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION A LIVING FACTOR IN THE LAND (Webber 2008, [http://rosicrucianzine.tripod.com/max\\_heindel.htm](http://rosicrucianzine.tripod.com/max_heindel.htm), accessed 23.9.2010).

Here, the 'directing of many secretaries' alludes to the importance of 'The Work' dictated by the 'Elder Brothers'. Heindel however, needed approval from his 'trusted partner'; the woman-of-means who took on the misunderstood mystic and felt the call to help him realise his spiritual genius. This scenario has resonance with Fred Robinson and Mary Broun-Robinson: '*We are Twin Souls or at least Soul Mates, brought together for The Work*' (Fred Robinson, pers. comm., 1971). Fred too was certain that invisible hands had saved his life when he – prosaically – '*fell from a tree and was gently lowered to the ground - and I didn't feel a thing*' (lectures, 1970s). The band of invisible helpers who would continue 'the special work' morphed into the Robinsons' desire that their organisation would outlive them – inaugurating a great movement with the special mission of bringing Christianity alive, as a way of living in the late twentieth-century until the inauguration of the New Age. At every level Heindel's life is reproduced in Fred Robinson's – yet the narrative and the texts conveying this were transposed and metamorphosed, rather than cited or used as texts of study. How far this was a conscious decision needs further analysis of Fred's – and later Mary Broun's – particular forms of eclectic reworking of Spiritualist and Theosophical influences.

## Natural Law and Vegetarianism

During his years as a member of the Rosicrucian Order of the Aquarians (ROTA), ‘Brother Fred’ certainly studied Heindel’s *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conceptions* (1909) and other *key texts*. One can without difficulty trace the genesis of Fred’s later teachings to these, particularly those concepts related to the importance Fred placed on *The Elder Brothers*; the value of the *retrospection exercises* he used and later advocated as a useful spiritual practice; and his focus on *Natural Law* – a key foundation stone of Fred’s schema, and the text that first informed his vegetarian diet. It is not only direct connection to the ideas and practices of Rosicrucianism at play here. Aspects of Heindel’s rhetorical style also emerged in Fred Robinson’s persuasive techniques. He adopted for instance Heindel’s use of emotionally charged language to present *non-sequiturs*, which depend on a form of logic that only comes about once one is convinced of a stance. It was one of the hallmarks of Fred’s own speaking/writing. The capitalised phrases in the following extracts from *Occult Principles of Health and Healing* (1938) appear in the original text, while the *Lucinda font* is introduced to point to similar word clusters in Fred’s speaking and writing of the 1970s:

The Rosicrucian Fellowship teaches that the wonderful organism called the human body is governed by *immutable natural laws*. All disease results from *wilful or ignorant violation of nature’s laws* ... It is natural that we should desire the very best of food, but every animal body has in it the poisons of decay. The venous blood is filled with carbon dioxide and other noxious products on their way to the kidneys or the pores to be expelled as urine or perspiration. These loathsome substances are in every part of the flesh and when we eat such food we are *filling our own bodies with toxic poisons*. Much sickness is due to *our use of flesh foods* (Heindel 1938, <http://www.rosicrucian.com/oph/opheng03.htm>, accessed 13.5.2008).

Both the teachings and the rhetorical style of Heindel were reproduced by Fred Robinson to his 1970s audience, without his audience knowing where his ideas came from. The teachings seemed new and vibrant to his listeners, and were through the intensity afforded by Fred’s delivery incontrovertibly *true*. As an embodiment of Heindel’s teachings on *natural law* Fred was able to (re)articulate Heindel’s teachings to my generation, reifying the then popular catch-phrase of the 1960s and ’70s macrobiotic and organic movement: ‘You are what you eat’.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> While the meaning of this maxim is clear: ‘that to be fit and healthy you need to eat good food’, the derivation of the phrase has come to us via a tortuous route. In 1826 Anthelme Brillat-Savarin wrote, ‘Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are’. In 1863/4 in an essay entitled *Concerning*

## The Esoteric versus the Exoteric

Cultural trends and innovations now in the ascendancy clearly had at least some of their roots in esoteric Rosicrucian teachings, but Heindel believed that truth should be shared with the world, thus making the Rosicrucian truths exoteric. Fred Robinson continued Heindel's legacy by attempting to *breakthrough to the mass consciousness* – the cultural mainstream. He often recounted how it was unfair to hold or *clutch the truth* within spiritual/religious cliques. The following extract exemplifies the rationale for esotericism within the 'one true' Rosicrucian order – a group very much at odds with Heindel's own teachings – and later with ROTA:

**The true Rosicrucian Order:** The constant and unauthorised use of the title Rosicrucian by imposters of every kind, with the idea of thus filling their own pockets at the expense of those of the general public whom they may thus succeed in beguiling, has at length reached the proportions of a veritable nuisance. That is why I am writing this article as the External Head of the True Order.

We are a secret Order, pursuing our studies in secret, and our Neophytes must be prepared not only to take, but also to keep a most solemn Oath of Secrecy as to our Rituals, Ceremonies, and Formulas, in which, however, there is nothing contrary to the civil, moral, or religious duties of the aspirant, also there is nothing to shock her or his self-respect. The grades follow in succession like the rungs of a ladder, or the steps of a staircase, each with its particular studies, its rituals, ceremonies and formulas, and its own particular Obligation of Secrecy (S. L. MacGregor Mathers, 'The True Rosicrucian Order', [http://altreligion.about.com/library/texts/bl\\_truerosicrucian.htm](http://altreligion.about.com/library/texts/bl_truerosicrucian.htm), accessed 26.5.2008).

It was this idea of exclusive, secret esoteric knowledge that Fred so intensely disliked: *We are now at a time when knowledge should be freely available to all who seek and ask.* Fred totally rejected the idea of making money from the information he shared, feeling that most organised groups *fell for this trap*, including, or perhaps especially, the supposed 'True Rosicrucian Order'.

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*Spiritualism and Materialism*, Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach wrote: 'Der Mensch ist, was er ißt.': 'man is what he eats'. Neither of these should be taken literally, they were simply stating that the food one eats has a bearing on one's state of mind and health. In the 1920s and '30s, the nutritionist Victor Lindlahr, who was a strong believer in the idea that food controls health, developed the Catabolic Diet (<http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/you%20are%20what%20you%20eat.html>, accessed 23.9.2010). In the 1930s Lindlahr hosted a popular radio series about nutrition. In 1940, he wrote the book *You Are What You Eat*, one of the earliest texts of the health food movement in the United States, which sold over half a million copies. His book is also credited with popularising the expression ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/You\\_Are\\_What\\_You\\_Eat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/You_Are_What_You_Eat), accessed 23.9.2010). The phrase got a new lease of life in the 1960s hippie era. The food of choice of the champions of this notion was macrobiotic wholefood and the phrase was adopted by them as a slogan for healthy eating (<http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/you%20are%20what%20you%20eat.html>, accessed 23.9.2010).

The ethos of the Heindel's Rosicrucian influence on Fred is helpful in understanding his first experience of a sense of mission – a foundation for further missions that included the *Oahspe*, *The Urantia Book* and a plethora of channelled messages from other *Elder Brothers*. The belief that Fred was aligning himself with these Elder Brothers is reflected in the following, which underscores the notion that a student of a 'mystery school' like the Rosicrucians has been involved in a scientific method of soul unfoldment advocated by those on high as intermediaries between God and man:

All those aspiring ones who align themselves, 'in spirit and in truth,' with The Rosicrucian Fellowship and its Teachings, place themselves within the sphere of the Illumined ones of the human race whom we speak of as the Elder Brothers of the Rose Cross. It is greatly to our advantage as spiritual aspirants to realise the full significance of this fact and endeavour zealously to reap the full benefit of such a wonderful privilege. We can help make ourselves more attractive to their assistance by taking time to meditate upon them and their humanitarian endeavours, to send them our gratitude and love, to rededicate ourselves to serving them in their constant efforts of uplifting humanity.

The mass of humanity is taken care of by the religion publicly taught in the country of their birth; but there are always pioneers whose precocity demands a higher teaching. To them a deeper doctrine is given through the agency of the Mystery School belonging to their country. When only a few are ready for such preparatory schooling they are taught privately, but as they increase in number the teaching is given more publicly. The latter is the case in the Western World at present. Therefore the Brothers of the Rose Cross gave to Max Heindel the Philosophy as published in *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception* and sanctioned the launching of The Rosicrucian Fellowship to promulgate the Teaching. The purpose is to bring aspiring souls into contact with the Teacher when by service here in the Physical World they have shown their sincerity and given reasonable assurance that they will use their spiritual powers for service in the other world when they shall have been initiated therein. The scientific method of soul unfoldment advocated by the Elder Brothers is always bound to benefit anyone who practices it and can never under any circumstances cause harm to anyone. (Rosicrucian Fellowship website, <http://www.rosicrucian.com/zineen/magen103.htm>, accessed 26.5.2008).

## The Early History of ROTA

How much time Fred spent studying the texts of Heindel at the Brisbane Temple of ROTA prior to 1937, when he became 'Brother Fred', the *renunciante* (as Fred referred to himself) is unknown. As a neophyte he must have initially commuted between his family at Lake Weyba on the Sunshine Coast, and the unusual silver-domed headquarters of ROTA in Borva Street, Dutton Park, on the lush banks of the Brisbane River.<sup>118</sup> The secretive nature of the group, which was to shape Fred's life from the

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<sup>118</sup> On April the 23<sup>rd</sup> 1943 Fred Robinson was ordained as a priest of the Rosicrucian Order of the Aquarians (ASIO File, Queensland Flying Saucer Clubs, 1971).

mid-1930s until the early 1950s is mentioned in Magnus Clarke's *Nudism in Australia* (1982) but without reference to the umbrella parent organisation ROTA, which he had not connected to the Queensland Gymnosophical Society (QGS) – the publicly known entity within naturist/nudist circles:

The origins of the Queensland Gymnosophical Society (QGS) are not known and the story of this nudist association – which was a commune rather than a club – is strange. 'The aura of mystery surrounding the Queensland Gymnosophical Society seems to baffle people now just as much as then' [anonymous research assistant's interview] ... The first attempts to form this group took place in the 1920s but no firm evidence exists on this point. The commune repeatedly failed and repeatedly restarted (Clarke 1982, p. 117).

My research adds substantially to knowledge of this group, for I was able to find a photocopy of *Summerland Scenes* (1948), an official prospectus, almost a recruiting booklet, which detailed a selective history of the group up until the publication date, along with the constitution and aims, a wide range of their unusual activities, and ambitious development plans for an extra 800 acres they had procured by the time of publication. I have drawn substantially from this publication, for it tells much about Fred's trajectory as later New Age teacher, as well as fleshing out the *modus operandi* of this meagrely researched Australian NRM of the 1930 and '40s.

### **Parcæ and Ione Long**

William Henry 'Parcæ' Long, (13.11.1894 – 3.9.1963), was the official Prelate of the Rosicrucian Order of The Aquarians, while Ruth Eda 'Ione' Long (5.5.1885 – 3.3.1950), his wife, was the mystic seer and spiritual teacher of the group. The health giving findings of Dr Augustine Rollier (1923) and the teachings of Maurice Parmalee about a new gymnosophical 'way of life' (1927) had been creatively combined with Heindel's mystical but practical 'truths'.

The Longs, thus inspired, started an independent Australian Rosicrucian Order with the distinctly Aquarian addition of communal naturism. Fred, when asked questions about his time with this group, said it was based on a combination of Heindel's Rosicrucian ideals, the Indian 'naked sages' who Alexander the Great had met, and the Greek



‘naked’ Olympian tradition of health-giving gymnosophy.<sup>119</sup> Additional factors that shaped the group were of course the qualities of the founders – Parcae Long’s leadership style, ambitions and personal predilections, and Ione Long’s clairvoyance and day-to-day spiritual guidance.

*Summerland Scenes* (1948), was referred to in Clarke’s *History of Nudism* (1982), but since he had no copy of it, he does not mention the Borva Street Temple in his short sketch of the history of the Queensland Gymnosophical Society. Prelate Long, the author of *Summerland Scenes*, explained that he had moved to the equable climate of Queensland in May 1923, and realising ‘the wonderful naturist possibilities’, tried to find others of like mind. The results were ‘extremely disappointing’, but for the occasional enjoyment of naturism with ‘one or two congenial companions’ (Long 1948, p. 10). In 1927 Long undertook ‘extensive public and universal Educational Work’,<sup>120</sup> but despite ‘making hundreds of contacts’, these naturist activities remained restricted to ‘a few inmates’. The reasons cited for their ‘extreme difficulties’ included ‘the lack of proper channels of contact; harassing by the Authorities; and public ridicule’ (Long 1948, p. 10).

In 1930 Ione, then aged 45, and soon to become Mrs Long, ‘gave her powerful organising support to Parcae’s Educational Work’ and ‘by dint of unremitting effort and personal sacrifice, pioneering work during these years was determinedly pursued, until

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<sup>119</sup> The following modern explanation of this term is useful: ‘Gymnosophy was originally the doctrine of a sect of philosophers who practised nudity, asceticism and meditation. In the early-twentieth-century, the term was appropriated by several groups to denote a broad philosophy that included as a central thought that the nude human body is a natural condition and should be accepted widely for the betterment of society. This philosophy is related closely and, often interchangeably, with nudism and naturism’ ([www.gymnosophy.org](http://www.gymnosophy.org), accessed 22.09.2008). While the internet has brought gymnosophy back to life – the sites have become very popular – claims have also revived over the probability that Alexander the Great did meet Indian gymnosophical sages:

Probably the first people to combine nakedness with the sacred were those sages of the Indus Valley in the pre-Vedic period, four thousand or more years ago, who decided to deliberately shun clothing. Besides the Jhelum River, a tributary of the Indus, just over 2,300 years ago a group of these sadhus met the most powerful man in the world, Alexander the Great ... although Alexander was a military man ... he had been taught by Aristotle, and had encouraged the local traditions of religious worship wherever he had campaigned. So when he came upon a group of naked sadhus in the realm of Taxila he was undoubtedly fascinated by them. Proud men are impressed when they encounter strength in others, and these naked sages displayed a courage born from their disdain for worldly attachments (Carr-Comm 2010, pp. 52–54).

<sup>120</sup> The way in which this Gymnosophical Wordsmith used Capital Letters is a habit that carried into Fred and Mary Robinson’s writing. I have been faithful to the original text when quoting.

the end of 1939 when the Rosicrucian Order (ROTA) sanctioned the purchase of a tract of virgin bush covering 154 acres'. In the Christmas holidays of that year 'an Inaugural Meeting of Naturists was convened' and they petitioned ROTA requesting 'the issue of a Charter of Foundation and a Warrant of Establishment of the QGC' (Long 1948, p. 10).

It is unknown whether Parcae or Ione had known Max Heindel or Augusta Foss-Heindel. The Australian tabloid *Truth* states that 'Mrs. Long had been head of the Order since Heindel's death...' (*The Truth*, 12.3.1950, p. 1). As I have had no response to any of my requests for clarification on this point from those who have continued Heindel's legacy at the International Headquarters of The Rosicrucian Fellowship, Mt. Ecclesia, Oceanside, California, the relationship between them and the Long's 'independent' Rosicrucian Order of the Aquarians must remain a mystery. That the Californian Rosicrucian Fellowship funded ROTA is clear (Coral Robinson, pers. comm., 6.11.2007). Having come from the same root stock, it is not surprising that the constituted main aim of the Queensland Gymnosophical Community is similar to that of the Universal Brotherhood: 'To promote Practical Spirituality by fostering a genuine Spirit of Brotherhood among Members' (Long 1948, p. 10).

While the early work of the group was not detailed in the short history canvassed in *Summerland Scenes*, it involved a period of about a decade at Dutton Park. I remember Fred mentioning a period when he did a bakery run in Brisbane as part of *The Pioneering Work* prior to moving out to the Browns Plains property. One of the later newspaper reports I found referred to this period: 'The Brisbane Rosicrucians some years ago became the subject of much publicity when they occupied the silver domed premises in Borva Street, Dutton Park' (*Truth*, 5.3.1950, p. 7). This information, found after hours of *microfishing* in the Brisbane Library, led me to do some field research.

### **The Silver Domed Temple**

I visited the site of the first Temple and Headquarters of Parcae's ROTA in November 2007 with Jeremy Gilmore, one the grown children of the UBI Community and a second cousin. After having lunch with him, and talking about my discovery in the archives that morning, we spontaneously decided to take a taxi and explore. By simply

knocking on doors we were directed to a long term resident who remembered the distinctive building, and also recalled some of the activities of the residents. Known simply as ‘The Temple’, the unusual domed building became an abiding curiosity for the younger generation – for more than its architectural wonders:

The Temple had a remarkable history. They were ‘sun worshippers’ alright. There was a man who lived nearby here who was ten years older than me ... he died just two months ago ... he could have told you a lot more than I can. We often spoke about the place. He and his brothers used to row out into the river as teenagers, the object being to look back into the premises in the hope of seeing them in the buff. After the dome was up the place was popped together over the years, with a number of additions on the sides of the central silver dome. It faced North East and was a pink building. It was certainly a popular destination for after school exploration. I remember once rowing up the river myself and seeing the sun worshippers on the balcony. But I was a fair bit younger and missed out on a lot of that stuff (Noel Synnott, pers. comm., 9.11.2007).

Fred Robinson was remembered by another ex-resident of Dutton Park with whom I later spoke:

They built it just at the start of the Depression. It was right at the end of Borva Street where number 24 is now. I remember Fred Robinson a bit later on ... he was a real toiler, and he worked hard for that mob of loafers. I had respect for Fred more than any of the others. He was always working, building and delivering their bakery products – hot cross buns and all sorts (Laurance Mee, telephone conversation, 12.11 2007).

Fred was indeed a worker, and one who could not tolerate loafers. He used to say

*Twenty hours a day was never enough to do the vital Work that needed to be done to set patterns on the ethers... that's what we were doing with the bakery: setting patterns on the ethers of the planet. We were there to practicalise the spiritual and spiritualise the commercial* (Fred Robinson, pers. comm., 1970s).

Fred Robinson’s extreme work ethic, while inspiring initially, was also to set patterns of guilt *on the ethers* of the Universal Brotherhood. The dichotomy between family responsibilities and the demands of *meeting the needs of the moment* in the Community were problematic, and perhaps always will be in idealistic Intentional Communities and New Religious Movements – for *the needs* are endless. The lofty aims seem to justify the exhausting of the limited means of individuals eager to do all in their power to further the group goals. Within 24/7 live-in-groups, this dynamic makes it difficult to avoid some unhealthy practices that are associated with NRMs – especially as almost all work is unpaid, or lowly paid, ‘voluntary work’. The ‘burn-out’ syndrome

was a real issue in the Universal Brotherhood in the 1970s, and it is recognised as a real problem in the domain of NRMs generally.<sup>121</sup>

There were many reasons why it was not easy for these gymnosophists during the early 1930s:

During the Depression there were also a couple of hundred people living in the heavy bushland on the banks of the Brisbane River at Dutton Park. They made life difficult for these oddballs. I think this contributed to them changing their headquarters to Browns Plains, not long before the War. The temple became quite ramshackle (Laurance Mee, telephone conversation, 12.11.2007).

With all the local interest in their activities, and the concern of parents for the moral well being of the children in the area, who had shown an unwavering keenness to explore the estate, it must have become clear to Parcæ and Ione Long that their gymnosophical mission was going to have to move to a more secluded location.<sup>122</sup> The move to Browns Plains occurred in 1939. It is ironic that this iconic temple, built with such high-minded intentions, was to end its service so ingloriously:

An English migrant family squatted there after the sun-worshippers left for Browns Plains. During the War the building became a popular brothel for American soldiers on leave. I remember a big American Negro getting off at the number 16 bus stop and asking me, 'Hey man where's the cat house?' I also remember the Yankee landing crafts stopping on the bank next to the place ... everyone knew what was going on there.

I have a vague memory of me and a mate poking around down there hoping to see something. We had to be careful because the locals didn't want to see any young people down there. There was certainly a lot of hanky-panky going on in the 1940s. There may

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<sup>121</sup> 'The Impact of Cults on Health' by Anne Tapper (RN, MA, MSN) in *Nursing Spectrum*, September 2002, examines why 'burn out' as a health issue is so relevant in NRMs, revealing 'a high-demand schedule with much time spent in group-centred activities, such as meditation and chanting, fund raising, proselytising, and religious study...'. While this researcher refers to such groups as 'cults' Tapper qualifies and defines their multi-meanings – and makes a further point: 'To outsiders, cults may be inexplicable, but each trait that describes a cult is commonly found in human society. It is the combination of traits and the intensity of each that create the potential of exploitation and harm (Tapper 2002, <http://www.reveal.org/library/psych/The%20Impact%20of%20Cults%20on%20Health.pdf>, accessed 5.6.2010).

<sup>122</sup> It is also likely that being directly opposite the site of the University of Brisbane, with only the river between them and the North-East facing solarium, the Longs may also have suspected that students would be likely to take up 'bird-watching' – with binoculars.

have been squatters too I don't know? The building was demolished over a period after the war<sup>123</sup> (Laurance Mee, telephone conversation, 12.11.2007).

## **A Gymnosophical Perspective**

The following review of *Summerland Scenes* (1948)<sup>124</sup> sets the 'scene' for the supposedly outrageous practices attributed to this Order. The extensive quotes flesh out the details of the building projects and amenities provided, the practices and principles, along with the legal structure and business activities, all gathered up in official records of the day to day life of Brother Fred and his son Richard (who was nineteen when they made they became neophytes in 1936). This period of association with ROTA, involving somewhere between sixteen and nineteen years for Fred, shaped his future life as a catalyst and prophet for the New Age. For Richard it became his life-long work, and it cut him off irrevocably from the rest of his family.

It is worth pausing here to reflect more on what gymnosophy was – as a way of life – to adherents like the Longs and Fred Robinson. Dr Maurice Parmelee, the editor and main contributing author of *The New Gymnosophy* (1927) was the pioneer spokesperson of nudism, naturism and gymnosophy in America. Parmelee received doctoral degrees from Yale and Columbia Universities and taught Anthropology, Sociology and Economics at the Universities of Kansas, Missouri and Minnesota. In retirement Parmelee wrote a pamphlet for the American Gymnosophical Society titled 'What is Gymnosophy?' (1952); it has been reproduced here as it reflects what the founders of ROTA clearly believed would supplement Heindel's Rosicrucian philosophy.

Gymnosophy is a philosophy of Nudism and Natural Living, based on the scientific principles of cultural evolution. Gymnosophy embodies the enjoyment of all of the beneficent aspects of nature of which mankind is in a large part deprived and the utilisation of every beneficial product of culture. Gymnosophy endeavours to regain what mankind has lost through civilisation without rejecting anything of human, social or cultural value.

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<sup>123</sup> The temple was demolished after WWII, probably between 1946–1948 (Long 1948, p. 7). More research on this landmark domed temple could be done through the nearby Boggo Road Gaol, now turned into the local Historical Society: <http://www.boggoroadgaol.com.au/>.

<sup>124</sup> I had become aware of the existence of *Summerland Scenes* through Clarke's *Nudism in Australia* (1982). I was able to track it down at the National Library, Canberra, using an on-line facility non-existent when Clarke undertook his research.

The enjoyment of nature is an end in itself more than any other human pursuit, and is therefore the most satisfying of pleasures. It has nothing to do with profit, competition and communism or most of the characteristic activities of our civilisation. The enjoyment of nature is closely related to the desire for and maintenance of perfect health, which is in itself, the most natural of pursuits.

The most intimate and satisfying enjoyment of nature can be attained only when naked, because then there's nothing between man and nature and he feels himself wholly a part of nature. When Gymnosophy is practiced by both sexes together it satisfies the normal desire to see the opposite completely, and furnishes the most natural form of human association. Thus the Gymnosophist is encouraged to develop beautiful and physical perfection instead of concealing ugliness with clothes.

Gymnosophy is a way of life, aiming at maximum fulfilment through the cultivation of Nudism and Natural Living. It is not a new sect, but the outcome of a long tradition that has inspired many of the world's thinkers and creative artists. Class and caste distinctions would disappear to a large extent, as well as many oppressive religious, legal and sartorial restrictions. Gymnosophy would restore to the body the importance and dignity to which it is entitled (Parmelee 1952).

This research has unearthed rich details of the first attempt to form an 'Aquarian' Gymnosophical Community in Australia. It was perhaps the first modern rural intentional 24/7 gymnosophical Community in the world, predating 'hippie communes' by almost thirty years. Having explored its early history, gymnosophical philosophy and practices I have represented this group in more detail than I had first intended. The part that Brother Fred played, initially as a neophyte of Parcae and Ione Long, and later as ROTA's main adherent and worker for almost twenty years, makes this detailed study imperative to the understanding of Fred Robinson, the motivating founder of the UBI and a key *cultural catalyst* of the New Age in Australia.

## **The Browns Plains Brotherhood**

Much of what Brother Fred learnt at ROTA was later transposed or perhaps embroidered into the fabric of his teachings for the 1970s *cosmiccounterculturalists*. While the nudist/naturist/gymnosophical element was dropped from the Robinsons' schema of the 1970s, the underpinning spiritual, agricultural, educational, sexual and dietetic philosophy was retained. Any history of the Universal Brotherhood must therefore explore the ROTA and its founders Parcae and Ione Long and the naturist Community they formed; for in many ways they were forerunners of the uninhibited counterculture of the 1970s – the *back-to-the-land New Agers of Austral Aquaria*.

When researching the life of an organisation, especially a New Religious Movement, it is easy to become immersed in the weaknesses, idiosyncrasies and outright cultural high-weirdness – and this is even more so when the group stopped functioning over half-a-century ago. The temptation is to neatly create a pigeon-holed depiction of it via a largely negative cultural stereotype. While it is important to be aware of the foibles and failings of ROTA, it is just as valuable to explore their motives and plans and the contributions they made in their time – and could still make; even if their experimental contribution shows what doesn't work, and why.

The group's material development, their legal structure, their government, their business ventures, their educational and spiritual activities, all reveal that they were cultural innovators. A number of 'Aquarian' initiatives were set in motion through the array of corporate entities which ROTA started, entailing a convoluted legal framework. The ever practical, and (at least publicly) silent Fred Robinson and his son Richard probably did most of the actual work involved in getting ROTA's various enterprises off the ground. If these initiatives failed soon after being set in motion, this appears to have been of little concern. Certainly Fred seemed somewhat detached regarding ROTA's failures when talking about them in the 1970s. He often said to me, '*we were simply setting patterns on the ethers Stephen - making a start is the most important issue*'. When reading of their attempts today I can't help wondering if the oft used term 'under construction' is code for 'seriously thinking about it'.

Parcæ Long's brochure, *Summerland Scenes* (1948), is the only extant record of this unique Australian Community. It seems that all other publications and records of the group were lost in the 1955 floods that destroyed the on-site Temple Press Printing Shop (Coral Robinson, pers. comm., 6.11.2007). As this publication has never been examined in the literature pertaining to New Age, Intentional Communities, or New Religious Movements in Australia, and because it is so relevant to understanding the beginnings of the Universal Brotherhood, I have not hesitated in quoting extensively from it – for the text itself contextualises the movement's history and reveals its lofty plans.

# Australasian Gymnosophical Health and Education Association

BOX 1624V, G.P.O Brisbane Queensland, Australia

**Queensland Gymnosophical Society: the parent Pioneer Society:** The first tranche of 151 acres of ideal bush-land was purchased in 1939. It had 'a good creek and strings of lagoons, 17 miles from City Hall, Brisbane' and this was set aside for 'the Aquarian Health Resort', which would incorporate a 'Self Contained Community'. Here was 'built and installed' the following: 'An Administration Building, Aquarian Bush Church and Sunday School, Rustic Kiosk, The Retreat (fibro-cement self-contained flatettes), Rustic Shacks, Repair Shop, Tennis Courts, Outdoor Gymnasias and Swings, Games Room and Electric Lighting Plant.'<sup>125</sup> In 1941 an adjoining 154 acres on the same creek was purchased and called **Naturist Park** destined as the 'permanent home of The Q.G.S., and a rustic Club House was built'. Having the two properties 'made possible a hike of 2 or 3 miles without going off the property, and boating for half a mile'<sup>126</sup> Another 490 acres comprising two more adjoining properties were 'brought under control' in 1944 via rental 'giving first option of purchase' when the war restrictions were lifted. This land 'was reserved for the Queensland Naturist Community where the public *could have* built up its own Community;<sup>127</sup> the naturist Park and the Aquarian Health Resort both being private resorts.

**Inauguration of AGHEA:** During the second Naturists Convention (Easter 1945), where most of the States were represented, the Australasian Gymnosophical Health and Educational Association (A.G.H.E.A.) was inaugurated as an International Naturists Association. (d) 'To foster interest in

Aquarian Age Systems of education ... along the lines already being pioneered and evolved by the Aquarian College of Sciences.'

(e) To promote the establishment of Self-Contained Naturists Communities, and Communities progressing towards that objective. Such communities to be comprised of [sic] persons possessing progressive attributes of mind and individual capabilities allied to a pioneer spirit, to so prove the eminent practicability of such objectives when undertaken by individuals who are willing to live according to the Golden Rule, which in short, depends upon kindness, tolerance, naturalness and the "teachability" of child-like simplicity; and not upon "brain-academic" Intellect'.<sup>128</sup>

(h) To afford Youth every opportunity to express its individual initiative ... to make the way clear for the advent of a new World Order based upon the simple teachings and Life of the Nazarene completely free of all sectarianism, dogma, and personal vested interests' [Once again Fred's voice in the term 'completely free' is evident]. (Long 1948, p. 3).

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<sup>125</sup> The use of Capital Letters perhaps makes these appear grander than they may have been.

<sup>126</sup> This facility would be much sought after in the Nudist clubs of today.

<sup>127</sup> I have italicised the words '*could have*', as they seem to intimate the outside community's lost opportunity: not availing themselves of ROTA's community minded bestowal.

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<sup>128</sup> This object in particular has all the hallmarks of Fred Robinson's lexicon - 'pioneer spirit', 'teachability', and the term 'child-like simplicity' were especially favoured in his later rhetoric.



## The Legal Structure

ROTA was an independent association with strong links to Mrs Foss-Heindel's *Rosicrucian Fellowship* in Oceanside, California, which supplied the money to buy the land. ROTA, as 'the Dispensing Corporate Organisation' empowered 'the A.G.H.E.A. to issue Charters to all Affiliated Societies and Groups, voluntary or already constituted, private or public'. To 'save unnecessary duplication', they welded the organisation already created by ROTA into one, and registered it as the Queensland Gymnosophical Community (QGC) (ibid., p. 4).

In this section Long relates the woes of the pioneering work and praises ROTA for its assistance: the head of ROTA being the author, editor and the Prelate himself – the one and the same Parcae Long. Perhaps he is also subtly thanking his silent benefactors of the Rosicrucian Fellowship in California:

**Legal Establishment:** It has taken 20 years of continuous, determined effort, unstinting personal sacrifice and unremitting labour, to fully accomplish the Legal Establishment of all the above named activities ... within the restrictions of existing unsympathetic laws, under which we are compelled to live. It being a matter of principle that all be law abiding citizens, while still accomplishing the nucleus-setting for a more advanced expression of life, the accomplishment of

this most essential phase of pioneer work has been long, tedious and costly, and could not have been gained without the assistance and concessions freely afforded by ROTA. **In fact, it has required the co-ordinated, dovetailed provisions of Canon, Civil and Commercial Law**, to provide full freedom of operation required by Self-Contained Communities ... but only under the provisions of Canon Law can all three be unified [author's bolding] (Long 1948, p.4).

Long's reference to the dovetailing of canon law with civil and commercial law is interesting. It is something we in the Universal Brotherhood never thought about; however it is a key issue in the way NRMs interact within society. The founders of NRMs are convinced they have more wisdom than *the world* and therefore need to create internal laws and regulations relevant to *their world*. Many of these 'canon laws' are simply a way of institutionalising their own 'culture' – a word, which is defined in the business domain and most organisations as 'This is the way we do things around here' (Papa *et al.* 2008, p. 129) – but NRMs take their 'culture' much more seriously and formally, so they create a specific set of rules and jurisprudence tailored for their

religious organisation.<sup>129</sup> The interface between canon law and the laws and rights of the citizens of a State is one of the most contentious issues in the debate surrounding NRMs and religions generally. Religious freedom on one hand is held as a right by religious organisations; while on the other hand, the State has an obligation to its citizens to control religions that apply ‘duress’ to members, abusing the freedom of the individuals in an attempt to keep members in line and under control. In an ironic twist, the ‘freedom’ to practise nudism, naturism or gymnosophy at ROTA (and legislated for via its own canon laws), was a bind that inhibited social intercourse with the larger community – where it was against the law. It is quite probable that Fred’s wife Alice and all their children would have gone with Fred to ROTA had the community cultural norm of the time – being clothed – been the norm in the New Religious Community he wished to join. Instead nakedness was the drawcard, and the most advertised aspect of this NRM, making the idea of his wife and family joining him too opposed to the wider cultural-grain to be reasonably contemplated.

In any case, the editor goes on to assure ‘community-minded naturists’ that control by ROTA ‘can never be irksome’, as it had always been ‘free of the inhibitions and prohibitions associated with the usual narrow religionism’. Long states that ‘ROTA endorses Gymnosophy because Gymnosophy is a natural concomitant of the true Christianity, and attains its highest expression in the daily life of the Order Brethren’.<sup>130</sup> As it seems that Fred and Richard were the only official live-in ‘Brethren of the Order’ at the time the publication was written, it is clear that Parcae was making it sound as if it were a more well-established ‘way of life’ for a larger group than actually existed (Long 1948, p. 4).

That which follows was an extraordinary claim: “‘Nudism’ (the term having being degraded by the crude expressions of many adherents), is not tolerated; but full freedom

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<sup>129</sup> The following definition of ‘canon law’ is useful: ‘Any church’s or religion’s laws, rules, and regulations; more commonly, the written policies that guide the administration and religious ceremonies of the Roman Catholic Church’ ([http://www.answerbag.com/q\\_view/630908](http://www.answerbag.com/q_view/630908), accessed 6.6.2008).

<sup>130</sup> This statement is perhaps the reason that *The Rosicrucian Fellowship* has not answered my communications; for if they were the main benefactor of ROTA, they would be seen as having endorsed ROTA’s support of the QGC and its tenet of gymnosophy. It is therefore understandable that the present day group is not keen to reveal the connection they once had with this organisation. There could well be a longer story here that involves Ione’s life prior to meeting Parcae Long. But short of exploring the archives of this Californian Rosicrucian organisation these issues will remain unsolved.

is accorded the individual through all the grades of Naturism to the fullest expression of Gymnosophy' (Long 1948, p. 4). Whatever this exactly means, it helps to make some sense of Fred's later statements in the press on the subject of nudity.

### **The Witan and Witenagemot of Brown Plains**

Both Fred and Mary Robinson were always against democracy: '*How could the decision of an ignorant majority possibly be the best for any group?*' was the general idea. The principle of a representative core-group presided over by a benevolent wise person – as the 'nucleus' – was the preferred option. The big problem with this idea is how to find the 'benevolent nucleus'. Those who step forward to volunteer are already a problem. The idea of the Witan was not something I had heard Fred speak about, but this was evidently one of Parcæ's words to describe himself – and Fred and Parcæ were not fond of one another, for reasons that will become apparent:

**Government:** Both the Q.G.S., and the A.G.H.E.A. are governed by a Representative Council assisted by the Grand Executive Directorate, with a minimum of Rules; and operating upon the principle of the Witan and Witenagemot of Alfred the Great; which vests responsibility

in every member and formulates its decisions according to the conditions of the moment and not according to previous precedent. Rights of Franchise are enjoyed by all, from juniors of ten years of age upwards (Long, 1948, p. 4).

The empowerment of children over ten within the organisation is odd to say the least. In the 1940s such an idea would have been unheard of; but it would have no doubt been a popular idea amongst the children of this Community, had there been any. Alfred the Great (ruling from 871–901 A.D.) has been seen as 'a second Moses' (Lee 2003, p. 1), personally involved in the administration of justice. The 'Witan' was concerned about the poor and cooperated with his 'Witenagemot' or Parliament, respecting its rights, and even strengthening its power (ibid.).<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> The Witenagemot (Old English for 'meeting of wise men'), also known as the Witan (more properly the title of its members), was a political institution in Anglo-Saxon England which operated from before the seventh-century until the eleventh-century. The Witenagemot functioned as an assembly of the ruling class whose primary function was advisory to the king and whose membership was composed of the most important noblemen in England, both ecclesiastic and secular. In his work on Alfred the Great, historian David Sturdy argues that the witan did not embody modern notions of a 'national institution' or a 'democratic' body (1995, p. 124). The *Wizengamot* of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series of books, derives its name from the Witenagemot (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witenagemot>, accessed 7.6.2011).

Similarly, Fred and Mary Robinson did not have many rules initially. They introduced the saying in the Community: ‘*We have as few rules as possible but as many as necessary*’ – but it wasn’t long before many rules seemed to have become necessary.

What is intriguing in the short and enigmatic, if not cryptic, summary of the Government of the Queensland Gymnosophical Community quoted above, is the potent phrase ‘assisted by the Grand Executive Directorate’, which has the same ring to it as ‘a Conclave of Cardinals’. For all its Alfredian provenance, this, like all the Communities Fred either founded or was affiliated to, maintained a secure inner core of unquestionable ‘spiritual’ authority – at this point Parcaë’s and Ione’s *Guidance*.

### **The Largest Naturist Block in the World**

In a section of *Summerland Scenes* (1948, p. 4) titled ‘Locale, Surroundings and Facilities’, Long explained that ‘As Australia is not naturist minded’ there was no call for ‘public naturist activities’ on the 490 acre property which had been ‘rented and temporarily reserved for eight years for that purpose’. ROTA therefore purchased the property and incorporated it within the Queensland Gymnosophical Community, making possible the unusual boast: ‘This makes a total of just on 800 acres the largest area in the world controlled by one Naturist Society’. The one and a quarter miles of ‘good creek’ was ‘proven to be a good natural tonic water’, while the many lagoons were ‘in all ways ideally suited to all naturist community activities’ and the bushlands ‘afforded natural screen protection’ (ibid.). At this point Long launches into a brochure styled text clearly designed to appeal to the European naturists being invited to be sponsored by the QGC if wishing to immigrate:

Wildflowers appear almost all the year round, and on very few days is naturism restricted to indoor. To see the White and Blue Gums in the moonlight, or the undulating glint of sunlight on the bracken (both surrounding all existing buildings) is to possess a peace-inducing memory. The whole area has been declared a sanctuary for fauna and flora, the birds and other wildlife have gradually increased, and have added further to the natural charm. Car

tracks and hiking paths are always being extended to picnic spots, fruit trees and linking buildings. A hike of between 6 and 7 miles is possible within the boundaries of the Q.G. Community. With all its abundant possibilities, it is only just outside the Greater Brisbane boundary; half an hour’s pleasant car trip to the City, and under an hour’s run to Moreton Bay, the sea breeze from which keeps the Q.G. Community cool all the summer’ (ibid., p.5).

There seems to be some clear gilding of the naked lily in this prospectus cum brochure. For insistence ‘the bracken surrounding the existing buildings’ is likely to have been a *bush fire concern* as much as a ‘peace inducing memory’. Given the hyperbole, what is to follow is a remarkable achievement; to have provided half the facilities they claim would have been impressive. It is no wonder Fred often said of these times: *Twenty hours a day was never enough to do what needed to be done*. The following list of facilities fleshes out the picture of the (almost) burgeoning Queensland Gymnosophical Community in 1948. The period was clearly their only period of real growth – or at least potential growth – and one which they hoped would become sustainable. These early Post-War years were the heyday of the Community, a time when they felt that at last their hard work and prayers would see their dreams and visions materialised. It was perhaps not dissimilar to ‘being in the flow’, a term used in the Universal Brotherhood in its own heyday, about thirty years later.

### **The QGC’s Services, Amenities, Accomplishments and Plans**

In a section headed ‘Recreation Reserve’ it is explained that adjoining a part of the creek best suited to it, an extensive recreation reserve was equipped with the following:

Swimming and Boating Pontoon; Natural Bathing Pool for non swimmers; Full-sized Tennis Court, Tenniquoits, Windmill and Horizontal Ladders, Horizontal and Parallel Bars, Giant Slide, Seesaw, Swing Boat and Swings, Sand Pit, Sands for Sunbathing on the Creek Bank and Memorial Shower Fountain (200 jets). In addition Ping-Pong, Bobs, Bagatelle, Rings, Darts, Quoits and

all the usual indoor games have been provided. On special occasions the whole of the above, including the Pontoon and the Creek, are illuminated with coloured electric lights. Sports Oval and Cricket Pitch are under construction, and the kiddies Switchback is in project (Long 1948, p. 6).

Although it is hard not to conclude that the term ‘in project’ simply meant being on the *to-do* list, other facilities and infrastructure were developed. These included a sophisticated pumping plant and pipelines that provided water to ‘all buildings, and orchards as well as many fountains ... which added greatly to the personal comfort of all ... as well as affording fire protection’. The building plans included the design of ‘a system of universal prefabricated cement blocks ... enabling amateurs to construct their own homes, even pretentious buildings, all of which will follow some adaption of the Shangri La Design’ which was evidently a design concept adopted by the Witenagemot for all future personal dwellings (Long 1948, p. 6).

A new building was being planned to house the Temple Press which had been transferred from the city, to handle all their own printing and ‘certain high class specialised work for outside clients as well’ (ibid.). The prospectus advertised that they could ‘absorb one adult representative and two lads in the Printing Office, one being apprenticed’ (ibid., p. 13). They also advertised that they could ‘absorb three persons’ as sales representatives for their Educational Books and Special Printing business, explaining that they held the Caxton Publishing Company Agency and had ‘extensive newspaper advertising’ which would therefore ‘eliminate unnecessary canvassing, thereby involving a minimum of work as the Company merely requires orders to be booked accompanied by a deposit’. There were more incentives that would ‘provide a good income for part time only’ (ibid., p. 12). Once again it is hard not to see this *job-opportunity* as an example of Parcae’s spin.

### **Alternative Medical Treatments**

‘Mecca Medicaments’ was the trading name of ROTA’s Self-Help Treatment Cartons, the result of their ‘health research and experience over the last quarter century’, coupled with their ‘access to the archives of the Order’.<sup>132</sup> Mailed all over the world, the treatments produced ‘outstanding results’ and were ‘founded upon natural scientific principles’. These treatments used ‘a very powerful Ferment of a somewhat similar character to penicillin but greatly superior’ and were said to ‘attack both negative and positive disease germs, for example tuberculosis, pneumonia, cancer and influenza and heart troubles’. Along with ‘various other medicaments’ all their products were ‘germicidal in action’, being ‘non-poisonous’ they were designed to ‘vitalise the nerve force (instead of depleting it)’. As ‘Self-Help Treatments’, they were said to ‘completely obviate the need for a treatment clinic’, while ‘at the same time they teach the individual persons to heal themselves, correct their errors in diet, and so align themselves with Natural Law’ (Long 1948, p. 12). The stance expressed here can be seen as a precursor of many of the alternative therapies of today.

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<sup>132</sup> I have a hunch that these archives existed on the ‘inner levels’ of spiritualist ‘contact’ and were channelled through Ione, as this was her forte. ‘*She could examine the Akashic records at will*’, Fred once told me.

The list of nine extraordinary sounding ‘Kits’ included the ‘Comprehensive Kit: Designed to meet all general emergencies including Pneumonia, Pleurisy, Antrums and Appendicitis, for people living at a distance from doctors and hospitals. It will save life many times over. 50/-’; and then there were the more specific treatments such as the ‘Piles Kit: Stubborn cases respond to faithful following of instructions. 50/-’, and finally, and I just couldn’t resist including it, the ‘Mumps Kit: Adults recover health in one week. 40/-’ (ibid. p. 16). The question of what it does for children will remain unanswered.

Fred mentioned in his lectures and to me that Ione had produced a range of products, most based on pawpaw, an ointment that was a most effective germicide. It is likely that there is a story behind ROTA’s making and distribution of pawpaw ointment in Queensland for overseas distribution.<sup>133</sup>

Mecca Medicaments seemed to be their main mover, as they advertised positions for the immigrants they were trying to attract: ‘Full and part time employment immediately available, assuring incomes up to £10 a week (the result of selling 20 treatment kits a week) still leaving time for Community work ... (this would absorb three adults as Sales Representatives and one lad in the laboratory and factory)’ (Long 1948, p. 12).

### **Aquarian Health Foods**

Under the trade name ‘Aquarian Health Foods’ the group distributed ‘100 per cent. wheatmeal products in all pastrycook lines’. They proudly declared: ‘... we are the only people who can make all such lines’. They had opposition too: ‘we fought the State Health Dept. on this for three months but won our case’. At the time of printing, in 1948, they were in the throes of printing the “Chromo-Ref” Vegetarian Health Recipe Cook Book, which converted meat, poultry and fish recipes into vegetarian dishes ‘in

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<sup>133</sup> A *Brisbane Times* article ‘Fortune does Grow on Trees’ (Caligeros, 19.4.2010) reveals that Lucas Pawpaw Ointment has become a recognised mainstream product – having gone beyond a *cult following*: ‘It’s a cure all product that is a favourite of stars and celebrities across the globe ... “We’re so proud. It’s amazing” said Kevin Talbot, a 74-year-old fourth-generation producer, who now heads the operation.’ Talbot explained that his great-grandfather developed the fermented papayate ointment upon migrating to Australia in 1876. ([http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/business/fortune-does-grow-on-trees-20100416-sk9u.html?from=age\\_ft](http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/business/fortune-does-grow-on-trees-20100416-sk9u.html?from=age_ft), accessed 9.6.2010). In 1930s Brisbane, with a relatively small local market for these products, it is it altogether likely that the Lucas Pawpaw Company either supplied Mecca Medicaments with their base ointment or else were in stiff competition with them.

which appearance, flavour and nutritional value have all been catered for ... and passed the practical test ... they are based on Natural Dietetic Rules and are health promoting' (ibid., p., 6). Once again ROTA can fairly claim to be one of the forerunners in the making and the commercial distribution of health food products and vegetarian alternative recipes in Australia.

Long's advertisement in *Summerland Scenes* is clearly designed to staff this Aquarian Health Food business: 'The establishment of a Baker, Pastrycook and Cafeteria within the Community, will fulfil a definite and essential need, and provide full time occupation for a resident with suitable qualifications' (ibid., p. 13), with the added bonus that 'Pioneer research work...' would also be available, while 'the surrounding district could also be supplied (this could absorb a married couple as full time occupation)' (ibid.). The number of '*coulds*' in the prospectus should have, and probably did, ring warning bells for the more discerning naturist readers of the *Summerland Scenes* prospectus. In the following excerpts of this advertising text I have italicised the qualifiers, bogus assurances, and claims of future possibilities made by the author – the redoubtable Parcae Long, the entrepreneurial Prelate of this enterprising and innovative Aquarian Order:

General Store which *could grow rapidly into a multiple project absorbing several persons.*

A Carrier: ...an *excellent opportunity* exists to establish a combined goods and passenger service.

Florist-Nurseryman: Experimental growing ... indicates that a living *would be assured* in this for experienced gardeners.

Fruit Orchardist: The soil *is particularly suited* to the growing of Figs, Citrus Fruit, certain Grapes, Passion Fruit, Nuts etc. ... Sufficient *ground is available* for orchardist.

Market Gardening: *Exceptional opportunities* ... due to the *advanced agricultural methods known, which will* ... eliminate the use of soil poisoning chemical

fertilisers and sprays ... (Several families *could be absorbed herein.*)

Dairy Farming: *If good Jersey cows are purchased* and hand fed, a good income *is assured* ... for a small Dairy farm *or two.*

Poultry Farming: ... for egg production *would provide an assured income* and contribute to making the Community self-contained.

Industrial Fuel and Timber: A large acreage of *valuable firewood* ... *would provide substantial income* to several residents *capable of* robust physical work.

Administrative Office: requires one Junior Technical Clerk, and later additional male clerical assistance *will be required* (Long 1948, p.13).

Note the 'male' distinction in the last advertisement. It seems that a female secretary, especially in an office with a gymnosophical (no) dress code, could be seen as a temptress; or perhaps William 'Parcae' Long, the self-appointed 'Grand Knight and



Scribe' (ibid., p. 16) of this Browns Plains Order, preferred to have young men or boys around him.

To cater for the possible omission of vocations that *could become available*, Long includes a section which caters for future development – optimistically of course.

**LATER:** As the community develops, more persons *can be occupationally absorbed* ... School Teachers, Instructors, Mechanics and Builders etc. *would be required permanently* ... As the number of New Residents to be approved, is *not intended to be* a large one (Quality not Quantity, being the determining factor),

each *approved* [family] Unit will be expected to shoulder some departmental responsibility... experience, and personal particulars will be taken into consideration by the Executive Directorate when considering each application (Long 1948, p. 14).

While the words 'definite' and 'assured' are occasionally used, the words 'could' and 'possible' more than balance the scales when relating to the positions advertised in this text. How the businesses were to be run and who owned them were made very clear. The sophisticated legal structure makes the four dedicated residents of the Order sound like part of a major corporation. Prelate Long and his Witenagemot had the company 'empire-like' structure worked out to cover most contingencies. Even though it is hard not to be cynical about the convoluted structure, it must be remembered that the QGC and ROTA were designed to be not-for-profit.

**NON-PROFIT PRIVATE COMPANIES:** All commercial activities wholly controlled by ROTA are undertaken by Rosicrucian Aquarian Mecca Pty. Ltd. All commercial activities directly relating the Q.G. Community are covered by Austral-Aquaria Pty. Ltd. These two private Companies are non-profit producing and have been incorporated under Special Provisions of the Company Acts.

It will therefore be apparent that the Q.G. Community, which operates upon Full Community Principles, is non-commercial, in that it does not function for the production of personal profit, all Community activity being for communal benefit in which all Permanent Community Residents participate (Long 1948, p. 14).

There was to be no private enterprise as such. An income could be made, but not ownership of a business for personal profit – this was the big disincentive of the project (and one which would be continued in the Universal Brotherhood). Parcæ had quite a business head, having carefully thought through the ramifications of the probable

disaffected immigrants who might not find what they were looking for at the strictly controlled Queensland Gymnosophical Community:

An Adjustment Period of Three Months from the date of arrival is permitted to enable new arrivals to settle down, familiarise themselves with Full Community Principles and Practices, and to select their permanent Home Sites, Farm Lands etc. To protect against undesirable persons gaining entrance to the

Community, each approved Unit of new arrivals pays to the Hon. Sec. of the Company, an Integrity or Good Faith Deposit of £50 immediately on arrival or before. At the end of the Adjustment period this Deposit is credited as part of the Community Contribution required to be collectively made... (Long 1948, p. 12).

This somewhat complicated computation was to be ‘determined by the General Assembly’ (ibid.), an undefined body in the hands of the Executive Directorate, with Parca Long, the Prelate and the Witan of the Witenagemot (the General Assembly) at the helm; and while this clearly protected the community from being taken for a ride, there were to be upsides for the new arrivals too – they could own their own money:

Such can constitute or be included in any required ‘Landing Money’. All capital in excess of the above Financial Obligations shall remain in each Member’s own Private

Savings Account to be operated at his discretion at all times. This places all residents upon an equal footing in the Community (ibid., p. 12).

Accommodation was available to new arrivals ‘at nominal rental until they constructed their own permanent homes, for which sites no rental is charged’ (ibid.). If it was difficult for ‘New Residents’ from Europe to get their head around the physical conditions and constrictions imposed by the group, then it must have been extraordinarily challenging to comprehend the more cultural, educational and spiritual understandings of these ardent Gymnosophists. However, Long was to ensure that the appropriate education was close at hand.

### **The Only College of its Kind in the World**

The writing about the educational objectives and plans of yet another of ROTA’s legal entities – this time in adult education – starts colloquially:

The Aquarian College of Sciences: Away back in 1936 The Brisbane “Daily Telegraph” published an article describing the work and objectives of the Aquarian College of Sciences in laying the

foundations of the New Age System of Education and Culture. This work is steadily progressing and twelve Faculties have already been planned with Correspondence Courses of Instruction.

Probably the three faculties of greatest interest to Gymnosophists and genuine Naturists, are:– The Faculty of Gymnosophy which confers two Degrees, Doctor (Gym.D.) and Bachelor (B.Gym); the Faculty of Aquarian Theology conferring two Degrees – Doctor (D.A.Th.) [Dr. of Dietetics and Aquarian Theology]

and Master (A.Th.M.) [Master of Aquarian Theology]; and the Faculty of Health conferring two Degrees – Master (H.M.) [Master of Health/Hygiene] and Bachelor (B.H.) [Bachelor of Health/Hygiene]. Courses in all subjects are arranged to meet individual needs (Long 1948, pp. 6–7).

Long goes on to describe what would be taught in the Faculty of Gymnosophy; but before he does so he assures us of its educational benefits: ‘The following details of the Faculty of Gymnosophy reveal the thoroughness and educational benefits afforded by the A.C.S Courses’ (ibid. p. 7).

### **The Faculty of Gymnosophy: Degrees: Doctor and Bachelor**

**Group I**

Naturist Principles and Practices.  
Dietetics.  
General Knowledge of Sociology Subjects.  
General comprehension of Aquarian Education Principles.  
General Knowledge of Aquarian Theology

**Group II**

Community Government.  
Hygiene.  
Physical Culture & Athletics.

Natural History.  
Bush Lore  
Geology

**Group III**

Culture and Ethics  
Health  
Child Study and Training

**Group IV**

Building Construction  
Architecture  
Electro-Mechanics  
Handicrafts and Hobbies  
Entertainment Organising

A special page near the end of *Summerland Scenes* (1948) deserves special consideration. The page is an advertisement for this College; its Old English Gothic font representing the tone of high-seriousness associated with its prospectus:

**“Pioneering Education for the New Age”**  
**The Aquarian College of Sciences**  
**A Universal Educational Foundation Without Limitation**  
(Long 1948, p. 15)

Formed in 1936 (three years before the move to Browns Plains) this educational foundation ran Aquarian College of Sciences Graduate courses for twelve guineas, with fees payable in advance. This covered ‘continuous instruction until graduation attained’. There was a bonus too – receiving ‘Post Graduate Research Reports’. One could thus

become a Professor in Gymnosophy of the Browns Plains Aquarian College of Sciences attaining a doctorate from ‘The only college of its kind in the world’. The staff surely intended to make a worthwhile contribution to attendees, for the course was ‘planned to meet the individual needs of pioneer individual students everywhere’, while it encouraged students to ‘Write to us of your difficulties and we will help you solve them’ (Long 1948, p. 15). The qualifications of lecturers at this unique institution are fascinatingly enigmatic:

**Dean of the College:**

R.E.I. LONG.

Ven. Dean A.M.O.R.K.T., D.A. Th., Prof. of Health.  
Director of Etheric Research (ibid.)

This ‘etheric research’ included the making of charts of the previous incarnations of resident members, and also those of some famous and infamous figures of the times, including Adolf Hitler (Fred Robinson, pers. comm., 1970s). All this presumably gave the few members of this New Religious Movement a feeling that they were on the inside of world events. They were encouraged to see themselves as having esoteric knowledge about what was really happening *on the inner-planes*, and *intuition* which *guided them* as to how to set these *etheric patterns* to positively influence the development of the imminent New Age of Aquarius. While Ione was the mystic researcher and ‘Venerable Dean’ of this ‘Department of Etheric Research’, her husband Parcae was heading his very own Senate. Long certainly had an uncanny ability to endow himself with the most remarkably imaginative qualifications/résumé ever to be seen; and perhaps one of the most pretentious. In the following I have attempted to identify the credentials and qualification he lists as his attainments:

**The Founder and President of the Senate**

Rev. WILLIAM H. LONG

‘Gd. Kt. [‘Grand Knight’] COMM.-Prelate-Aq. A.Ac.D. A.Th., J.P.

[‘Aq.’ no doubt stands for ‘Aquarian’; ‘D.’ for Divinity; ‘A.Th.’ for ‘Aquarian Theology’; and ‘J.P.’ Justice of the Peace].

Prof. of Gymnosophy. Director of Scientific Research.

Founder B. & I. College of Astrology. Gd. Prior A.M.O.K.T.

[What the B. & I. stands for is unknown; Long was evidently a Grand Prior of A.M.O.K.T., a group I have been unable to trace – not to be confused with AMORC the Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis].

Director of Tuition for Aquarian Courses.

Editor “Austral Aquaria” and “Gymnosophical Health and Cultural Education”  
(Long 1948, p. 15).

Fred Robinson is not mentioned in this prospectus. Almost 10 years older than Parcæ, Fred had either been too stubborn, or too humble; or perhaps he had distanced himself from the pretentiousness he saw in Parcæ and the organisation he had dedicated himself to furthering. The name of his son Richard did appear, for he had become the printer of ‘Gymnosophical Health and Cultural Education’ the ‘official organ’ of the College (ibid.).

### **Registrar**

R. NORMAN ROBINSON B. A. Th.  
Art and Publications technologist (Long 1948, p. 15).

In the area of education this Rosicrucian Order could well have *set a pattern on the ethers* regarding special types of correspondence PhDs that have been developed in various global locations in recent years. Certainly the description of the College as ‘...an Extra-Collegiate, and Post Graduate Educational Foundation without Limitation’ (ibid., p. 7), covers every possibility – and provides a degree with minimal effort.

Fred Robinson would, I believe, have seen all the letters after Parcæ’s name as humbug; a pretentious show, and nothing to do with *being a servant to all*. Perhaps this was one of the reasons they could never get along. Fred’s two major mottos in life were ‘*Impersonal selfless loving service for the benefit of the whole*’, and, ‘*The greatest amongst you shall be the servant of all*’; the latter being Fred’s take on Matthew 23:11.<sup>134</sup>

I have found it difficult to place Fred Robinson in the context of this Aquarian College. I suspect since he was enamoured of Ione, he put up with Parcæ’s pomposity. Fred certainly never used his own Rosicrucian Doctorate letters ‘Gym. D.’ after his name, and I am sure he passed all his assignments. Whether Fred ever taught at the college is unknown. Given the shortage of Professors in Gymnosophy it does seem likely; Fred’s ability as a speaker also suggests he served in this capacity. Certainly ROTA was planning a full scale alternative university, with modern lecture halls and audiovisual equipment.

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<sup>134</sup> The verse in Mathew 23:11 reads: ‘But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant’ (KJV).

‘The A.C.S. Lecture Hall’, like so many other things, was ‘under construction’. Interestingly they were recycling the materials of ROTA’s demolished Temple in the City (Long 1948, p. 7). This dates the gradual demolition of the Borva Street silver domed temple to the period just after the War and before 1948, as the ex-local-resident I spoke with confirmed (Laurance Mee, telephone conversation, 12.11.2007). The hall was to be equipped with a public address system and Cinovox Projectors for visual education, while catering for ‘the needs of a Picture theatre, Concert Hall, Theatricals, Functions and Dances’ (ibid.). There was to be no shortage of fun and culture in the imagined future of this community – but this was always in the future. From what I gathered from Fred, it was all work and no play for these pioneer celibate gymnosophist Aquarians. In the 1970s Mary was to make sure that the Universal Brotherhood had its own creative ‘fun nights’, even when there were few people and no facilities.

### **The Spiritual Amenities**

Until all the people arrived the hall was to be used to ‘temporarily house the ROTA Temple Furniture until the New Temple (Baby Cathedral) can be constructed of Cement Blocks, the site for same having already been dedicated’. Here we see so many plans, but without the people it was simply more *patterns on the ethers*. They had even planned for future traffic regulation: ‘Surrounding the College Lecture Hall is a double loop drive which will eliminate all traffic congestion’. The aesthetics of the buildings to be had not been neglected either: ‘...the approach has been laid out with rock bordered gardens, fountains and lily pond with numerous jets. Garden lamps and seats are also to be installed’. Note the ambiguous term ‘laid out’, which can be read as ‘done’ but was almost surely ‘sketched out on the ground’, just as the lamps and seats were ‘to be installed’ (Long 1948, p. 7).

The bracketed term ‘Baby Cathedral’, as a descriptor for the new temple, is a particularly good example of the way this *Aquarian brochure cum marketing prospectus* was designed to appeal to European recruits, who could not see it until they arrived. Remember that naturism was much more popular in Europe than in the colonial world – and so was old styled traditional religion. A ‘Cathedral’, even a ‘Baby

Cathedral’ would have been an attractive religious amenity. The word ‘temple’ was still used, but ‘Cathedral’ had a grander European ring.

‘The Aquarian Bush Church’ was now on the site of ‘the Alfresco Tea Garden’, and was ‘a comfortable building covering the religious services needs’, while also housing ‘the Kindergarten and Sunday School’. This means that the church, the outside eating area, the kindergarten and the Sunday school were actually located in the same spot. I suspect the latter may have existed only in Parcae’s expansive mind as there seem to have been no children.

To cater for yet more cultural needs in the future ‘A Concert Hall-Ballroom and Roof Garden Theatre could also be considered to cater for the public and outside naturists, and if too large a project for the Community to undertake at present, could provide a return for some interested investor upon some mutually acceptable basis of lease or contract’ (Long 1948, p. 7).

This entrepreneurial planner had certainly thought it all through. The only problem was there were no public or outside naturists remotely interested in visiting, let alone investing – in fact most were actively antagonistic. However, this seemed to be a secondary consideration, perhaps because the focus of ROTA was after all the setting of *etheric patterns*. Having read all the plans (and there were more than I am able to present here) it is understandable that Fred used the term ‘*Alternative Society*’, for that is what Parcae, Ione, Fred and Richard had in mind – a quite literal *World within a World*. They were certainly thinking both big and long term, for the prospectus included the decision to ‘build a Community Library’ which was ‘to be located between the New Temple site and the Lodge Keeper’s Residence and the Main Gates’ (ibid., p. 8). A ‘Community Burial Ground and Crematorium Site’ had also been allocated by 1948 and ‘was soon to be consecrated by our Ministers’ (ibid.). It is important to recognise that Fred was by now a Minister, as was Richard and perhaps other ordained *Gymnosophical Graduates*. Shades of the royal plural ‘*our*’ can also be detected here, as the author of the text, Parcae, elevates his *Prelate-Witan-Self* above his mere *gymnosophical-self*.

## Spiritual Activities

ROTA had, according to *Summerland Scenes* ‘continuously operated on a Non-Sectarian Basis, its teaching being a completely harmonious blending of Science and Religion following the simple example and Teachings of the Master Jesus’ (Long 1948, p. 8). They also believed that the Rosicrucian Order, of which they were the present day heralds, ‘enjoyed unquestioned Spiritual and Scientific Authority for centuries’ (ibid.). Almost by osmosis this kind of *assumed knowledge* was passed on to The Universal Brotherhood (without the Rosicrucian references). We often made the most outrageous claims without thinking twice about them. I simply assumed for instance that Fred’s ‘research’ was right; much in the same way as Fred had assumed that Ione, and his later *Text Books* (the *Oahspe* and *Urantia*), had ‘enjoyed unquestioned Spiritual and Scientific authority ...’ (ibid.).

Historically there are only tenuous threads linking any form of Rosicrucianism to Gymnosophy. Perhaps this is the reason why this stand-alone Order made ‘strenuous efforts towards the establishment of Gymnososophical Activities ... an essential factor in its College of Theology Courses’. Perhaps trying to appeal to its potential source of Naturist members in Europe, the text stresses that ROTA was ‘the only Spiritual Organisation which has officially sponsored Naturism, and in consequence has withstood continuous attacks, criticism, ridicule, official harassing, and ostracism’ (Long 1948, p. 8). The religious/spiritual aspect of the community was clearly hard to sell, but they did their very best and did try to sound reasonable:

The ordained Ministers of the Order are legally empowered to perform all sacraments, including Marriage, Births and Deaths. Life without the Spiritual and Scientific is one-sided and incomplete, and could not therefore be a success; and no Community could function as a Self-Contained Community without the Religious Aspect of life forming an integral part thereof. We but stipulate that all

Spiritual and Educational Activities within the Community shall be under the control of ROTA; but this does not mean that all residents of the Community must attend Rosicrucian Services. Each person is a free agent to attend or not as he desires ... So no one need fear having some particular brand of Religion thrust upon him, but true religion is the handmaiden of true culture (ibid., p. 8).

Attempting to provide the religious needs within the Community, these eclectic Rosicrucians did not want to make it impossible for the outer-circle, the members of the



Queensland Gymnosophical Community, to worship elsewhere. Having said this however, outside worship was clearly not encouraged: ‘So far as we are aware, there is no other church within 10 or 12 miles radius ... but residents are free to attend outside churches if they wish’ (Long 1948, p. 8). The implication here is that there was no real reason for anyone to leave the Community when all the residents’ spiritual *needs* were being supplied. This same idea was often implied in the self-sufficient and ‘world saving’ aims of the Universal Brotherhood Community. I have italicised the word ‘need’, as it became an important part of Fred’s idiom in the 1970s, especially in his distinction between *true needs* and *conditioned wants*.

Long made it clear without using the word ‘nude’ or ‘naked’, that the *no dress code* applied to their lectures and religious services: ‘...full provision is made therein for purely Gymnosophical Services and Lectures as desired. Sincere naturists will know and appreciate the desired facts’ (ibid.). The idea of the ushers handing out the hymn books to a congregation arriving *in the buff* – the favoured expression of the time – is certainly a countercultural image – as frightening as it is amusing.

### **Hubris at ROTA**

The Rev. William ‘Parcæ’ Long’s self-confident trumpet-blowing, all too evident in his *Summerland Scenes* reflections on ROTA’s pioneering contributions to Naturism and Gymnosophy, are an indicative example of the kind of rhetoric which can be observed in many texts written by founders of New Religious Movements. It is as though the more disregard and disrespect the greater society (the world) has for a marginal NRM (the little world) the more the NRM will engage in hubris; a practice that often only hastens its own downfall – as if subconsciously living out the maxim ‘pride cometh before a fall’. The lack of cultural self-esteem and (perhaps unconscious) self-confidence seems to engender a kind of boasting that attempts to compensate for the emotional pain implicit in the rejection of the ‘truth’ which the founder wished to give to society – in this case the freedom of their gymnosophical philosophy and Rosicrucian teachings. This almost unavoidable predicament often leads NRMs to make outrageous predictions regarding their own destiny. This only exacerbates the situation.

To those who live in *the world*, one of the most annoying features of an NRM is the grandiose idea they have of their own importance. Long's text in the following is a good example; one which has some textual similarities (see italicised text) to the presumptuous statements made by members of the Universal Brotherhood Community some 35 years later:

ROTA has so far provided the whole of the Funds, Organisation, Properties and Labour for the establishment of the Q.G.C. and the A.D.H.E.A. and has provided the only accommodation and conveniences for Naturists in Queensland. It *has performed most of the pioneering work in Australasia*, and in consequence no other Gymnosophical Activity in the world can offer all the facilities, conveniences and benefits enjoyed by Members ... it is with every confidence that the Foundation

Members of the Q.G.S. claim that the Q.G. Community *can become the Highest Cultural Centre, providing as a "Nucleus Setting" the cultural standards for the New Aquarian Age ...* Such is the Home of the Australian Gymnosophical Health and Education Association, and the Queensland Gymnosophical Society Community, *located in the Country destined to become the World Centre of the New Aquarian Civilisation* (Long 1948, p. 8).

Later in life, having recognised the weaknesses of ROTA's gymnosophical regime, Fred believed he had *filled in the gaps* in his understanding – and those of a select band of New Agers – to be able to confidently re-badge the above statement for the early 1970s:

*It is with every confidence that Mary and I believe our Fraternity can become a nucleus of the Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God to set an example of cultural standards for the New Aquarian Age. Such is the home of the Universal Brotherhood Community, located in the Country destined to become the World Centre of the New Aquarian Civilisation* (Fred Robinson lectures, 1970s).

The concomitant idea that Australia was to be the centre of the world's *Aquarian Civilisation*, came from Ione (and perhaps other mystics that Fred contacted later), who believed that the *planet's main Aquarian spiritual energy centre* had *jumped the Pacific from California to the East Coast of Australia*; then later, *when the Eastern Seaboard lost its chance, it jumped again to Western Australia* (Fred Robinson lectures 1970s).

This jump of energies – as well as being a leap of logic – suited Fred after he relocated to Western Australia. The related ideas of ‘Cosmic Power Points’<sup>135</sup>, and ‘Ley lines’<sup>136</sup> were subjects that had currency for the Aquarian seekers of the 1970s, and still do in New Age circles; but amongst sceptics such concepts are simply flaky pseudoscience. Whenever Fred told the story of this *jump of spiritual energy* to Western Australia, it encouraged some New Age space-cadets from the Eastern States to jump too – for some the decision was life-changing and life-shaping.

Perhaps needing to prove international recognition, through at least one testimonial, the following text was squeezed onto page 8 of *Summerland Scenes*; and probably at the last minute, by using a smaller font:

**The International Naturist Association:** One American applicant said, ‘I am most happy to link up with a truly International Association. Such a service is badly needed’. We too, are happy for the recognition there-by given to the voluntary service which we have rendered the Cause of Naturism (Long 1948, p. 8).  
Enquiries are reaching us by every mail from representatives of naturist bodies and individual naturists from all quarters of the globe – Britain, Ireland, France, Holland, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Scandinavia, India, Malaya, Fiji, Africa, Canada, New Zealand, California, Florida, New York, New Jersey and Australian States.

Regarding the last sentence of the above quote, I have not quite worked out what the ‘Cause of Naturism’ is. I know what naturism is, but the idea of it being a ‘cause’ somehow eludes me – and may have eluded others initially attracted to its practices. Perhaps this was not, after all, the paradigm around which all else could be arrayed. Fred ultimately came to this conclusion.

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<sup>135</sup> Mt. Shasta (at the southern end of the cascades in Siskiyou County, California) is one such cosmic power point, said by some to be a UFO landing spot, and the entry point into the fifth dimension. In 1932, the Rosicrucians popularised the belief that Shasta is the dwelling place of the Lemurians, super-humans who are so spiritually advanced that they can change themselves from material to spiritual at will. Over 100 New Age sects and groups now regard the impressive mountain as a sacred source of harmony and peace (<http://www.sacred-destinations.com/usa/mount-shasta>, accessed, 9.6.2010).

<sup>136</sup> Ley lines are alleged alignments of a number of places of geographical interest, such as ancient monuments and megaliths that are thought by certain adherents to dowsing and New Age beliefs to have spiritual power. Their existence was suggested in 1921 by the amateur archaeologist Alfred Watkins, in his book the *Old Straight Track: Its Mounds, Beacons, Moats, Sites and Mark Stones* (first published in 1925). The Abacus edition of Watkins’ work (1970) had resonated with my generation ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ley\\_line](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ley_line), accessed, 9.6.2010).

Although (in the above) Long records many testimonial ‘enquiries’, there are no recorded testimonials from anyone who actually lived in the Queensland Gymnosophical Community. I suspect this was because no one other than William ‘Parcæ’ Long, the Prelate and President of the Senate; Ruth ‘Ione’ Long, the Etheric Researcher and Dean of the College; Richard ‘Norman’ Robinson, the Registrar and Printing Technologist; and Fred Robinson, the unmentioned worker *Brother Renunciate* (Parcæ’s irritant-nemesis), actually lived there permanently. If they had they would have been mentioned. There were likely to have been a few ‘seekers’ or probationary members floating about the periphery of the action, but it seems that the one ingredient the Queensland Gymnosophical Community lacked was people. They made up for this lack with a plethora plans and rules.

From the foregoing excerpts of *Summerland Scenes* life in the Queensland Gymnosophical Community can be visualised, and especially so with the help of the thirty two photographs which illustrated the practical gymnosophists at work in the *Office Headquarters, Printing Office, Laboratory, Photographic Room, Engine House, and Smithy* (the use of the hammer and anvil when combined with the gymnosophical ‘personal equipment’ looked a bit scary to me). There are also pictures of the remarkably well designed buildings and amenities, included the *Aquarian College of Science’s Lecture Hall, Club Rooms, The Retreat, Printing Office, The Creek Retreat and Workshop, and the Garden Fountain*, with a few miscellaneous shots entitled *Shadow Play, Goldfish, Afternoon Tea, Sunset and Sunrise, and the artistic cover shot Reflections*.

This prospectus on the Queensland Gymnosophical Community is, for all its strangeness, a professional publication in its own right, and it does reveal that a remarkable amount of construction did take place. Parallel to the physical infrastructure, an entire regulatory apparatus had been designed – as the following excerpts attest. These are important to record, as they represent something that all NRMs seem to do – over regulate.

## Constitution and Rules

A section of *Summerland Scenes* titled ‘Abstracts from Constitution and Rules of the Queensland Gymnosophical Society’ (Long 1948, p. 10), which was the legal entity that controlled the Queensland Gymnosophical Community for the sponsors, the Rosicrucian Order of the Aquarians, outlined yet more objectives ‘in the process of accomplishment’ (ibid.). One of these is particularly congruent with Fred’s later message, and reads: ‘To promote Practical Spirituality by fostering a genuine spirit of Brotherhood among Members...’ (ibid.). The rules are interesting in that some of them are quite specific, proscriptive – and, not surprisingly, enigmatic: ‘Rule 4’ headed ‘Constitution’ cites a rule to ensure the following of the rules: ‘The Society shall be a Private Society constituted of approved Genuine Naturists of both sexes (subject to Rule 25), and of all ages, who in accepting invitation to membership, signify their full acceptance of the Rules of the Society and agree to abide by same’ (*Summerland Scenes* 1948, p.11). I will, to save you looking up Rule 25 in the National Library, skip straight to its qualification about the sexes:

**Women:** No single, unmarried, widowed, separated or divorced women shall be admitted to Membership of the Society, except that such Membership be a continuation of previous membership as a Junior, and then only subject to the approval and sanction of the Executive Directorate. No junior girls shall be admitted to membership except as members of a Family Unit approved by the Executive Directorate ... No female, Junior or Adult

Associate or Affiliate Member of the A.G.H.E.A. shall be permitted to visit the grounds or other premises controlled by the Society without Special Written Permission of the Executive Directorate.

Any visitor requested by the Executive Directorate through any of its Officers, to leave the Society’s premises, shall do so promptly and without creating a scene (ibid., p. 11).

This sort of gendered rule does have some resonance with some of the thinking behind Mary Robinson’s concern about the attractive and ‘coquettish’ young women who she worried might join or visit the Universal Brotherhood Community, even with her modesty rules firmly in place. Young naked single women at ROTA were clearly seen as a threat to the moral fortitude of the celibate Brothers.

## Advertising in Overseas Naturist Magazines

The Naturist magazines were seen as a vital marketing instrument for the development of the Queensland Gymnosophical Community and the Queensland Gymnosophical Society. Both had been set up by ROTA as its secular ‘naturist’ arm – its contribution to

the *outside* world. Bringing the world *inside* ROTA's sphere of influence, and on its own terms, rather than being influenced by the *outside* world was their strategy.

It was also the Universal Brotherhood's aim to build a new *alternative society, a prototype model of a New Age Community* for the world to copy. Initially Fred went on tour to *recruit pioneers*. Later when a stream of volunteers came to the Community he ran *seekers' classes*, informing them of the aims of the Community and *the cosmic changes* he believed were soon to come. This strategy of *drawing the right people into the group* is employed by many New Religious Movements which support a live-in Community. How recruitment is achieved varies greatly. Most groups are open about how they recruit, targeting the demographic that most suits them. In the case of the QGS in the immediate post-War period, the English and European naturists were an obvious choice.

The QGS was initially approved by one of the most prestigious English Naturist magazines, *Health and Efficiency*.<sup>137</sup> This was no doubt seen as a coup, being 'one of only a very few clubs to receive a mention' (Clarke 1982, p. 117). The September 1947 edition of *Health and Efficiency* noted that the Queensland Gymnosophical Society had widened its scope to become the Australian Gymnosophical Health and Education Society (AGHEA): 'At Browns Plains the two properties owned by the QGS – the Naturist Park and the Aquarian Health Resort had been amalgamated and formed into the QGS' (*Health & Efficiency*, September 1947, in Clarke 1982, p. 117). Clarke was not impressed by all the legal entities and name changes (and he knew only half of it): 'All these name changes immediately make the organisation subject to suspicion, giving it the air of a group attempting to avoid tax or creditors' (Clarke 1982, p. 118).

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<sup>137</sup> *Health & Efficiency* was first published in 1902 under the title *Vim*: an illustrated monthly devoted to promoting Health and Vigour in Body and Mind. The magazine is still in print today as *H&E Naturist* (<http://www.henaturist.net/joomla/>, accessed 9.6.2010). Back then the magazine covered health topics such as diet, exercise, herbalism, and general advice on living a healthy, hygienic and efficient life. In the 1920s when nudists/naturists began publicising their activities and sun clubs began to form, *Health & Efficiency* became an early champion of their cause. After the Second World War, nudism experienced a massive expansion and the monthly "*H&E*" – as it became known – was in pole position to promote the nudist lifestyle. Throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s *H&E*'s reputation as the 'nudist bible' grew ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H%26E\\_naturist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H%26E_naturist), accessed 8.7.2010).

It was through the English and European naturist magazines that ROTA was to develop its own recruiting program, which must rate as one of the most innovative immigration schemes ever devised. The Queensland Gymnosophical Community, with the entrepreneur Parcaë Long in charge, invited applicants to join worldwide, promising ‘fully self-contained accommodation’ (*Health & Efficiency* September 1947, in Clarke 1982, p. 119), while enjoining them to ‘come directly to the commune at Browns Plains...’ (ibid.). All seemed to be *going well and according to plan*, as Fred used to say, for another UK magazine judged the Community to be ‘making great “strides”’ (*The Naturist*, September 1947, in Clarke 1982, p. 119).

Initially most of these magazines cooperated, reprinting the Queensland Gymnosophical Community’s invitations, apparently attracting ‘great publicity to itself in Europe’ (Clarke 1982, p. 118). *Summerland Scenes* (1948) was printed and sent to these Naturist clubs to be distributed in England and Europe. The professional prospectus, replete with its many flattering photographs of the facilities and the surrounding bushland and waterways, along with the naked members relaxing in the sun, and working without cloths, must have been alluring to Naturists in the cold and difficult times of Post-War England and Europe.

With all its hyperbole and positive spin, it is only fair to say that Long does in *Summerland Scenes*, warn prospective members about the need to adhere to the policies and principles of the Queensland Gymnosophical Community:

Only sincere and enthusiastic Naturists, who are willing to work upon Full Community Principles, are acceptable as Residents of the Q.G. Community, which is destined to provide the most advanced practicalised example of Community Life yet demonstrated in the world. It will set standards for the future...

The above mentioned opportunities provide the necessary assurance of both accommodation and living, required by the Australian Immigration Authorities for the issuing of travel priority permits, ROTA agreeing to nominate the members of all approved Units.

If, after filling out all qualifying conditions, you are in full agreement with the above principles, and are willing to make the success of the Community your prime objective in life, we are willing to admit you to membership of the QGS, upon receipt of your Annual Subscription of £2/12/- for each adult, 18 years or over, in addition to the A.G.H.E.A. Annual Subscription. This will then qualify you to forward your Statutory Declarations and Applications for admission to the Q.G. Community as Permanent Residents therein in accordance with the terms and conditions arranged... (Long 1948, p. 14).

## Importing Problems

How much of a money spinner this collecting of ‘Annual Subscriptions’ from potential immigrant members was, is unknown. What is known is that ROTA began importing problems with its *sight unseen* but paid up members. These difficulties mainly revolved around ‘the unwillingness of many so called nudists to do pioneer work’ (Clarke 1982, p. 118).<sup>138</sup> While the type of participants who arrived from Europe may have been challenging for the core group of ROTA, there were it seems, darker reasons for the internal upheavals occurring in this Browns Plains Community in the late 1940s. Although it is now impossible to research the Queensland Police records of this time (due to a fire that destroyed the archives of this period), it is possible to explore one of the internal issues of the QGC. These centre on the possible/probable activities of the Prelate of the Order ‘Parcæ’ Long.

The first piece of information, while not proven, has been verified as ‘very likely’ by a Robinson family source, not wishing to be named. It seems that one of Fred’s boys, a young teenager at the time, who had accompanied Fred and Richard when they first went up to Browns Plains, was sexually abused soon after arriving. I had heard on a couple of occasions that this son had, sometime around 1937, ridden his bike non-stop back to the Sunshine Coast to escape ROTA (a ride of more than 70 kilometres). So traumatised was this boy that he refused ever to return. As I understand it he never saw his father again. The frenetic energy behind this dramatic departure, and the depth of hostility towards the place still held by Fred’s children and most of the Robinson grandchildren, supports the possibility of sexual abuse, especially when added to other particulars.

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<sup>138</sup> This term ‘*pioneer work*’ was recycled by Fred during his *recruiting drive* (the term he used) to the 1970s Australian Aquarian New Age generation. In some ways the Universal Brotherhood as a group, and its Seekers and Members as individuals, suffered the same fate as the émigré QGC gymnosophists; for while it was ‘pioneer work’ that was needed, many of the people who came were unsuited to such physical labour, being better equipped to engage in mental or creative work than the building, gardening and infrastructure development that was essential. Vocationally speaking, *Society* is a broad church – a *Pioneer Alternative Society* is not. One of the great problems of New Religious Movements like the 1930s–’40s Queensland Gymnosophical Community and the 1970s–’80s Universal Brotherhood Community is that in the *pioneer* environments they establish there is no ultimately fulfilling upward career path – except that of being a leader of some kind within the group, or being respected for certain skills. Despite my 1970s–’80s thinking on the subject, worldly careers are often far more important than first imagined by idealistic Seekers attempting to create a prototype of a new society.



The second piece of information comes from Clarke's reading of the *Health & Efficiency* issue of January 1949, 'which related that the Q.G.C. had advertised a "pen pal" service for naturists under eighteen and darkly alluded to other advertisements offering services far removed from Naturism' (Clarke 1982, p. 119). This 'service' is somewhat corroborated in *Summerland Scenes* (1948). A section related to the Australian Gymnosophical Health and Education Association (A.G.H.E.A), an organisation available 'to anyone affiliated with other Naturist Societies worldwide', makes the offer (in Part 4 of its 'Benefits of Associate Membership'), to give 'Free use of the "Let's get acquainted" Dept. of the A.G.H.E.A. and its Section in the Magazine' (*Summerland Scenes*, 1948 p. 9). This service appears questionable. The 13/- annual fee for this associate membership included a section for 'Junior Associate Membership', which was free. Once again an offer is made in Part 5 for the 'Free use of the "Let's get acquainted" Dept. of the A.G.H.E.A. and its Junior Section in the Magazine' (*ibid.*). Since no junior members were permitted outside the Family Unit, it is interesting to consider quite to whom such a service catered.

The final piece of information comes from one of Clarke's anonymous sources, who reported that by 1952 the community had collapsed and that shortly after Long was 'imprisoned for homosexuality with a minor, subsequently released but virtually mentally wrecked and soon after died' (anonymous source, quoted in Clarke 1982, p. 117). Actually Long didn't die until 1963, but he was clearly no longer a force in any gymnosophical organization – including the one he had started with Ione.

### **Fred's Toleration of Parcae**

The question I find most difficult to answer about Fred's involvement with ROTA is why he seems to have done nothing about Parcae's probable behaviour – especially in regard to his own son. I suspect Fred's loyalty to Ione – his almost worshipped mystic teacher – led to his toleration of Parcae as the figure head of the Order, for better or worse. From the research it is clear that Parcae was not humble. It also seems that he revelled in his power as 'Witan', 'Prelate' and 'President of the Senate'. His interest in

this power can be evidenced via the spiritual name he chose for himself, or accepted when given him by Ione.<sup>139</sup>

Like some heads of Religious Movements before and since, Parcae's own power and self-aggrandisement corrupted him. If the sexual misconduct allegations about him were true, it seems likely that Parcae's power gave him the ability to enact his illicit fantasies with young boys, and get away with them. For Parcae, the naked lifestyle, coupled with his vow of celibacy even within his marriage, is likely to have been a combination that inflamed this man's weaknesses.

For Fred, the survival of Ione's 'etheric' mission and the New Age ideals she was teaching at ROTA worked to override his sense of duty to report Parcae's probable offences. It is likely that Ione and Fred were trying to handle the situation without the police – and the inevitable closure of the place that such a report would bring. While little can be known of the events surrounding all this, the threat of the loss of the whole project must have driven Fred to keep silent – losing the respect of his ex-wife and all his family forever; and all connection between Richard and his siblings until a deathbed reunion in 1990. While there is no indication from Fred's life afterwards that he would be part of the paedophile activities to which Clarke alludes, Fred's turning a blind eye to his Prelate's misconduct must be seen as unconscionable. This line of reasoning helps to make sense of something Mary once said to me: 'Fred treated his first family very badly. He did not act honourably at Browns Plains' (Mary Robinson, pers. comm., 1970s). I never quite knew what she meant, thinking she was overreacting to the 'nudism' factor. Mary never did use the terms 'naturism' or 'gymnosophy' – she liked to *call a spade a spade*.

### **The Unravelling of ROTA**

Besides the 'darker allusions' Clarke refers to, almost everything was unravelling within this New Religious Movement – particularly so for William 'Parcae' Long.

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<sup>139</sup> In Roman mythology the Parcae were the personifications of destiny often called 'The Fates' in English ... Their Greek equivalent were the Moirae. They controlled the metaphorical thread of life of every mortal and immortal from birth to death. Even the gods feared the Parcae. Jupiter also was subject to their power (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parcae>, accessed 12.6.2010).

... he became involved in a running battle with *Health & Efficiency*, for in the January 1950 edition, in his letter to the editor he was admitting an uncertain future while protesting that the failure was not his fault but the migrants who 'did not trouble to find out the truth before they arrived' (Clarke 1982, p. 119).

Nothing Long could do improved the situation, and by the early part of 1950 'the QGC was an outcast' (ibid.). The annual report of the *British Sun Bathing Association (BSBA)* had been reprinted in full by *The Australian Sunbather (TAS)* (1950, no. 39, February) referring specifically to the QGA and admitting that it 'regretted' past assistance to the AGHEA and QGC (Clarke 1982, p. 119). By late summer 1950 the various pressures, both organisational and personal, evidently became too much for Ione, who had been unwell for some time. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March she took her own life. This public climax to the story of the QGC was unknown to Clarke, and it was this which precipitated the rapid decline of almost all Parcæ's plans for the Queensland Gymnosophical Community as a 'way of life', its corporate entities, and of Parcæ Long himself.

The following section, with extensive quotes from the various Newspaper reports, tells the story of Ione's suicide in the rhetoric of the day. It also examines the media discourse and the immediate effect on Fred Robinson's life. The longer-term effect of this event on Fred and Mary Robinson and their New Age Information Centre, 'Shalam', and then later on their *living-artefact*, the Universal Brotherhood, is also broached. The existence of the Queensland Gymnosophical Community, let alone this event, was something that few UBI members even knew about, and if we did we didn't know much about it. Mary Robinson was not keen that this unwholesome saga should come out into the open as part of Fred's back-story. I don't think Fred cared. He certainly couldn't be stopped from talking about his venerated teacher Ione, but it is understandable that Mary did care. The linking of the disgraced, and sexually charged QGC 'nudist commune' with the successful and modest UBI 'modern monastery' (as it was described by Mary) would do nothing for the latter's good name.

## **Ione's Suicide**

The *Brisbane Telegraph's* Saturday Evening issue of the 4<sup>th</sup> of March 1950 was the first paper to report the story of the tragedy that would immediately change the direction of Fred's life. A Melbourne tabloid with an Australian-wide circulation, ironically named *The Truth*, soon took up the story, developing it for the next few weeks. This section

traces the publicity afforded this event and its aftermath, stories which spelled the end of this communal experiment in gymnosophical *high-weirdness*. Everyone Fred knew from his respectable Bli Bli days must have been saying: ‘We told you so!’ – and with good reason.

## **WEIGHTED BODY FOUND.**

### **Amazing Police Search Ends**

#### **Drowned In Creek Near Sect’s Camp**

**A two day search for a 68 year-old woman ended dramatically this Saturday when her weighted body was found at the bottom of a creek bed at Woodbridge, 10 miles from Beenleigh.**

The body was that of Mrs. Ruth Long, whose husband according to police is the world leader of a religious sect known as the Rosicrucians. A big squad of police headed by C.I.B. and uniformed officers found the body with grappling irons on the bottom of the creek in 15 ft of water.

Two 7 lb weights were securely tied to each leg. Around the woman’s right arm was a heavy metal kettle secured by a rope.

Immediately the body was recovered the police instituted an intensive investigation. Later the police were able to report that the dead woman had been ill for some time and that there were no suspicious circumstances in her death. The search for the body was carried out in amazing circumstances. Several times this Saturday the police party were bogged down in wild inhospitable country in which the Rosicrucians have their headquarters.

#### **Camouflage Nets**

Dense undergrowth which obstructed their movements among isolated huts in which

members of the sect live, was made more hazardous by camouflage nets draped methodically over the 100 acres jungle settlement. Police cadets manned a small dinghy on the waters of the swirling 30 yard wide creek and had to cut their way through the jungle growth and camouflage that overhung its banks.

Mr. Long said he was the world leader of the Rosicrucians, a sect which bore no association with an order of the same name known as Rosicrucians California Incorporated.

Mr. Long was clad in full clerical garb when police arrived at the headquarters hut of the settlement.

The only two members present today were Brother Fred and Brother Long. They were clad in shorts and were deeply suntanned. Brother Fred also wore a long white beard.

Police were informed that the cult existed to relieve sickness and poverty

(*Brisbane Telegraph*, 4.3.1950, Saturday Evening issue).

It is to the credit of the *Brisbane Telegraph*’s editor that no mention of sensational or salacious ‘nudity’ was made in the initial report of Ione’s tragedy. Parcaë’s appearance in ‘full clerical garb when police arrived’ certainly provides a touch of ‘cult’ weirdness; just as ‘Brother Fred’ being ‘clad in shorts’ and ‘deeply suntanned’ alludes to strange goings on – but it does not explore nudist themes to stir up moral panic.

## The Media Aftermath

The *Brisbane Telegraph*, which boasted on its masthead ‘Largest Audited Circulation in Brisbane’ (4.3.1950), had run two editions of the above story on the Saturday. The first was headed ‘**BODY WEIGHTED DOWN: Grim Find In Creek Bottom**’ and appeared on page 7. In the evening edition it was promoted to the front page. *The Truth*,<sup>140</sup> the ‘Largest National Circulation of any Newspaper in Australia’ picked up the story the next day, Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> March 1950, and having missed the scoop to its rival, also placed the story on page 7, but coloured the reporting in its own inimitable fashion.

I have included additional detail here, with contextual references to the Borva Street Silver Domed Temple; some information about the group’s connection with, or more correctly, disconnection with their financial benefactors, The Californian Rosicrucian Fellowship; as well as alerts to some minor conflicting information. Deleting some duplication of content, most is retained, to reproduce *The Truth*’s sensationalised style of reporting:

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<sup>140</sup> *The Truth* was a Melbourne tabloid newspaper established in 1902. In its early years its politics was very much left-leaning, and it painted itself as the voice of the working class. Before 1945 it had a style of journalism that was high-pitched, sensational and melodramatic. The newspaper from its earliest days was based on scandal, particularly the records of the divorce courts, which were not subject to restrictions on reporting. In its later decades it featured photographs of scantily-clothed young women ... It was later owned by both the Fairfax group and Rupert Murdoch’s News Ltd. It is said that Dame Elizabeth Murdoch (Rupert’s mother) took a dim view of the *scandalsheet* and it was later sold. It was last published in 1995 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Truth\\_\(newspaper\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Truth_(newspaper)), accessed 8.7.2010).

# WIFE OF ROSICRUCIAN CHIEF FOUND IN CREEK

## Weights on Body

**The scantily-clad body of Mrs. Ruth Edna Ione Long, wife of the State principle of the Rosicrucian Order ...**

The Brisbane Rosicrucians some years ago became the subject of much publicity when they occupied the silver domed premises in Borva Street, Dutton Park.

Their meeting place then was one of the most spectacular sights of the city. About five years ago, the sect moved their headquarters to Woodbridge

**About 4 a.m. on Friday Mrs. Long was noticed to be missing from her bed. A police search throughout Friday was unsuccessful.**

Yesterday morning about 7.30 a.m. one of the party of police was dragging Scrubby Creek – close to the house where Mr. Long and his wife lived – when the grappling iron brought the body to the surface.

Mrs. Long was dressed only in a singlet.

Mrs. Long and her husband lived in the main dwelling and two other persons [Fred

and Richard] occupied huts which are surrounded by lawns and bush. ...The property is 14 Miles from Beenleigh and four miles from the main road [It was '10 miles' in the *Brisbane Telegraph's* version, and '17 miles from City Hall' in *Summerland Scenes'* version]. The nearest neighbour is approximately a mile away.

## NOBODY NEAR

Before her death Mrs. Long had been in ill-health for some time. She had received attention from a number of doctors.

In 1940 the representative of the Californian organisation declared that the Queensland Order had nothing to do with the original order of Rosicrucians. On that occasion Mr. Long said that the world headquarters of his organisation were in Borva Street, Dutton Park, with one branch in Perth. (Rosicrucianism, a system of mythical and metaphysical philosophy intended to guide the development of inner consciousness, is said to have its real foundation in Germany in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century) (*The Truth*, 5.3.1950, p. 7).

*The Truth* had very quickly made the story its own. While still not mentioning ROTA's gymnosophical 'nudist' practices, they were headed in that direction. The following week its reporters were hard at work stirring up *moral panic* about nudism – and this time it was designed for an Australia-wide front page story – one perfectly suited to increase the national circulation of *The Truth*.

## NUDIST'S HOME

Here are some 'Truth' camera-shots of the 'Rosicrucian' nudist sect up at Brown's Plains. Right: "Rev." William Henry Long, prelate of the Order, who admits that, like the others of the camp, he dons clothes only for "special" visitors.

Centre: "Brother Fred" Robinson as he was when "Truth" representatives visited the camp last week. It is not nudism he says but Gymnosophy [photograph of Fred with hat, boots glasses and hoe – with fencepost].

Bottom "ROTA" entrance (*The Truth*, 5.3.1950, p. 7).<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> This iron-gate entrance, with the letters ROTA above it, was unchanged when I visited in 2004.

## NUDISTS RUN OPEN CAMP IN BRISBANE

**WITHIN a few miles of the city open to the gaze of the curious, and to the accidental visit of members of the public, including children, is a nudist camp, about which, in “Truth’s” opinion the police should do something quickly ...**this nudist camp is potentially a menace to the innocence of children and others.

While the place is partially fenced, and partially screened by camouflage nets, the fences are barbed wire and lattice wood, and the camouflage nets are not effective screens, being diaphanous.

Nudism in “Truth’s” opinion is offensive when as little protection is afforded the public as obtains at this Brown’s Plains camp, and the nudists should be compelled to forego their practices, or else provide screens and barriers to prevent unwitting public entry to the camp.

Two “*Truth*” men walked into the camp unchallenged one day last week, and came upon “Brother Fred” Robinson doing his chores, clad mainly in a hoe and a hat. He also had on a pair of spectacles, a pair of shoes and a white beard but not a stitch of clothing.

**Long told “Truth” that other members of the public come into the camp and are received by the inmates in the buff. Only for “special” visitors are any clothes donned ...**

Mrs. Long had been the head of the order since Heindel’s death, and he himself now is.<sup>142</sup>

**“Truth”:** Do you practise nudism?

**Long:** Gymnosophy is our term for it, no matter what the outside world thinks.

Nudism can range to pure exhibitionism to sunbaking: but the original term is naturism – that is living in accordance with nature... Long said the degree of nudity practised depended on the weather, and the health of the member concerned, but from choice most of the members got rid of their clothes whenever possible.

### **MIGRANTS, TOO!**

Over 20 migrants – men women and children – had been nominated by him, Long said, and they were all naturists. However they only used the order to get to Australia, and were found incompatible with the order after they settled in.

For ten years, Long said, they had been planning to have an increase in the community. The camp was capable of holding 100 persons who could provide for every phase of life ... on the 800 acres of land that the order owned. It was planned that the intended members of the new community build homes. Those already there were in conformity with the regulations laid down by the Government for housing migrants (*Truth*, 12.3.1950, p. 1).

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<sup>142</sup> This corroborates my suspicion that it was Ione who was the ‘spiritual leader and teacher’ of the group – this is certainly how Fred saw her. This text also suggests that Ione knew Heindel in America; she was 34 when Heindel died in 1919

While the files containing the official history of the immigrants who came to ROTA may yield more secrets I have resisted the temptation of searching for them, believing that these histories would be too tangential to Fred's own story. *Truth* made another visit to ROTA in the week after Ione's suicide. The following interview with Fred Robinson was published on the back page of this same Sunday edition, and is perhaps the most worthwhile text related to Fred from this period, for it reveals how he was able to reframe issues. I have reproduced this Question-Answer article in its entirety:

### “THIS IS NOT NUDISM”

**Continued from the front page.**

At the nudist's camp “Truth” saw Fred Robinson (“Brother Fred”), busily engaged in chipping weeds from the garden. The only ornaments which adorned his deeply tanned body were as listed above [in the article on the front page]. “Brother Fred” said he was in charge of the camp while the Prelate (Long) was away, and he was acting as a warden.

**“Truth”:** Do you always go around the place here in the nude like this?

**Fred:** ‘Yes, but it is not nudism. That is only lust.’

‘Well if you don't call it nudism what is it?’

‘We are gymnosophists. You can look in the dictionary for the meaning of that, and you will see we are not nudists.’ (Webster's Dictionary, to which Brother Fred referred us, describes a gymnosophist as one of a sect of philosophers said to have been found in India by Alexander the Great. They were naked, ate no flesh, renounced pleasures, and employed themselves in meditation on the nature of the true being, and the absorption of the absolute).

**“Brother Fred,”** however did not clarify this but rambled on about spirits, reincarnation, and the purpose of life, which was to convert the world into one huge family.

**“Truth”:** ‘Do you think it is a good thing for people to be going about together without clothes?’

‘We believe in control, not the lustful propagation of the species. We make a spiritual approach to another being coming into our midst.’

**“Brother Fred”** continued that the Order did not recognise sex unless the spirit called upon them to bring another soul into the Order. However, “Brother Fred” was very evasive, and talked largely of spirits calling them when the time came for them to have another child in their midst. But he said that this particular aspect was for the Prelate to explain, because ordinary people would not understand it.

‘Do you consider this the headquarters, and Mr. Long as the supreme authority?’ – Yes. We have nothing to do with any other Order.’

‘You say there are only three practising members here. Are you expecting more?’ – ‘Yes, we are expecting a number of them to come to us here.’

‘By a number, do you mean there will be men and women among them?’ –

‘Yes.’

‘And no doubt they will go without clothing?’ – ‘That is correct. We approach it spiritually.’

Well, thinks “Truth”, the police should approach this realistically, and do something to have the practice of nudism discontinued, or else carried on without risk of public offence

(*The Truth*, 12.3.1950, back page).

The curious structure of this interview-based article cleverly forces Fred to condemn himself. *Truth* is able to summarise and judge ‘on behalf of all sensible people’ – a mix of the ‘common man’ perspective, and utter salaciousness in its story selection. While



there is much that could be drawn from this article about Fred Robinson's willingness to condemn himself out of his own mouth, more needs to be said about Ione's death. Here she is used by *The Truth* as a narrative hook to prove the general nuttiness of this small group of believers, and then as a prop in *The Truth's* own call 'to do something'. Ione's voice has been completely lost. I have found none of her writing, and no clear photographs of her. With no traceable family, it has proven difficult to track anyone living who even knew her.

### **Fred Robinson and Ione Long**

It is likely that Fred and Ione loved each other. Fred spoke almost in worshipful terms when he referred to her over twenty years later. It is also likely that their love was even more intense because it remained unconsummated. All the members had taken a vow of poverty and chastity, and Fred was a super-dedicated individual. In the sexually repressed hothouse of this naturist Community; with Parcae a homosexual and maybe a paedophile who had accosted Fred's son; with Fred and Parcae unable to get on, let alone 'harmonise'; it is understandable that life was unbearable for Ione.<sup>143</sup> Fred recalled to me that Ione had (through spiritual knowledge) told him that Parcae had been responsible for his death in a previous life, and that they had been put together to work out their karma in this particular life. This sort of convoluted relationship can develop in a New Age NRM Community, where police and ordinary 'human' law are seen as superseded by a 'higher' understandings and *Cosmic Laws*. Fred occasionally quoted the Shakespearean verse: 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy' (Hamlet Act 1. Scene V); but more often Fred and Mary used the adage '*God moves in mysterious ways his wonders to perform*' when confronted with the humanly unaccountable.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> As Ruth Edna Long used the spiritual name 'Ione' it is useful to know its meaning: 'Ione' is from the From Greek '*ion*' meaning 'violet flower'; also the name of a sea nymph in Greek mythology (<http://www.behindthename.com/name/ione>, accessed 12.6.2010).

<sup>144</sup> While not exactly Biblical, the saying 'God works in mysterious ways his wonders to perform', are the first lines of a hymn by William Cowper, probably his paraphrase of "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways", saith the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah, 55:8, KJV). Another possibility: '... wonder marvellously: for I will work a work in your days which ye will not believe, though it be told you' (Habakkuk: 1:5, KJV). These sorts of Biblical verses are used by the religious to justify all sorts of behaviours – but also to endow spiritual/deeper meaning to life's mysterious enigmas – both joyous and tragic.

## Sectarian Rivalry

*The Truth's* next Sunday edition (19.3.1950, p. 5) ran an article headed

### 'Object to Nudism':

Since "Truth" last Sunday drew public and police attention to the nudist colony being conducted by a so called "Rosicrucian" order, at Browns' Plains, near Brisbane, many letters have been received from the

members of the original, and genuine, Rosicrucian order, irately denying that the "true order" has anything to do with nudism (*The Truth* 19.3.1950, p. 5).

All the reporters and the police knew that ROTA was a private naturist organisation. It was self-censorship born of decorum that had restrained them from making this public – not *The Truth's* revelations. The following extracts reveal some of the moral panic and latent religious bigotry drawn out by the tragedy, inflaming sectarian rivalry, while proclaiming 'the truth' about the original and supposedly authenticated Rosicrucian Movement.

Margaret Stone from Ballina, a member of 'the authentic Rosicrucian Order' (ibid.) suggested that, 'the people who practise such things as nudism, should be punished' (ibid.), and that 'the true Rosicrucians do not practise nudism or any of the practices of these people' (ibid.). A Mr Arthur Ord, a *Master* of the Brisbane Chapter of A.M.O.R.C. claimed that his Order was 'the only true Rosicrucian Order ... and that it could be traced back as far as 1489 B.C., and that the original seal used by Pharaoh Thutmose III on that occasion is still in the hands of the Rosicrucian Grand Lodge in California' (ibid.). Ord went on to inform readers that 'the Browns Plains sect was founded on the teachings of Max Heindel and did not represent true Rosicrucianism' (ibid.). No one from ROTA answered these letters.

## Fred's Predicament

With his *beloved teacher* dead, and the publicity having died down, Fred left ROTA. The exact date is difficult to ascertain, but it appears to have been by the end of 1950 (Fred Robinson, in *Earth Garden*, 1972 p. 34). After this he was never to return on a permanent basis. His eldest son Richard continued to live there, gradually taking over the reins from the shattered Parcae. After Richard married in 1954, he and his wife Coral established the Good Companions Club. They were to resurrect the place as a secular nudist club, without the intense communal dramas or the change-the-world New Age

agenda. In later years Richard became ‘a valued volunteer’ of the Relaxation Centre in Brisbane, a New Age bookshop and seminar centre (Lionel Fifield, pers. comm., 2004).

While Richard and Fred were to remain in loose touch, it seems that Richard found it hard to forgive his father’s departure so soon after Ione’s suicide, as it left him with many responsibilities. Apparently ‘Fred had once promised Ione that he would keep an eye on Parcae, which he failed adequately to do, giving Richard a very difficult task until Parcae died’ (Coral Robinson, pers. comm., 6.11.2007). This adds weight to my theory of why Fred stayed after his other son was scared off in 1937. While Ione was alive *they* were ‘keeping an eye on Parcae’, but once Ione was dead Fred did not feel it was his ‘karma’ anymore. To say that Fred and Parcae had a ‘falling out’ would, I suspect, be an understatement.

It seems likely that although Fred had moved out of the Community, he returned often, using it as a base until Richard married Coral in 1954, for Fred was at ROTA in 1953 when Parcae was arrested (ASIO File, 1961). Fred then visited Richard and his daughter-in-law from time to time during the 1950s and ’60s. Although welcomed, Coral remembers him ‘going on and on about his prophecies and flying saucers – I couldn’t stand it’ (Coral Robinson, pers. comm., 6.11.2007). It apparently took many years of diligent work by Richard and Coral to gain a good reputation for the establishment, currently known as the Aquarian Naturists Retreat (ANR) – a member of the Australian Nudist Federation and ‘one of the most respected nudist clubs in Australia’ (ibid.). Since Richard’s death in 1990, the Aquarian Nature Retreat ‘has had nothing whatsoever to do with religion’ (ibid.). Some of Fred’s grandchildren still tend the property. The division set in motion by Fred’s joining ROTA still casts its shadow over this family over seventy years later.

Despite Fred Robinson’s ability to speak with authority later in life, during his ROTA days he saw himself as a behind the scenes *willing worker* and supporter of others *more qualified* than himself. Only after he left ROTA was he able to step out and speak in his own right – and to explore other information in the spiritual New Age literature of that time. Perhaps it is for this reason I have not been able to trace any mention of Fred Robinson in the extant literature of the ROTA organisations. It seems

Fred always refused to take responsibility for the projects he put in motion. He saw himself as a *simple pioneer, willing to do whatever needed doing*. He used to say, *'I am not qualified to do anything except doing what I know I should be doing – my own thing'* (pers. comm., 1970s). Fred followed the same pattern with regard to Shalam and the UBI:

*Mary is in charge of the day to day running of the Community. I am simply an information centre and catalyst. I'm happy to do simple manual work where needed, such as typing and gardening, but I am totally useless in any administrative capacity* (Fred Robinson, pers. comm., 1970s).

Archive shots of Fred hoeing weeds in the ABC TV *Compass* documentary 'The Brotherhood' (Critchley, 2009) are testimony to his ability to work even into his eighties. Sound bite sequences of Fred *socking it* to the camera in full rhetorical flight attest to his ability to speak powerfully, persuasively, and with extraordinary passion. Fred knew what he was best at doing. He was to say to me on the first day I met him, and without any hesitation or false modesty: *When the Spirit flows through me, Stephen, I am a catalyst – that is my thing* (pers. comm., 1971). I quickly came to believe that it was to be *my thing* to facilitate Fred's *catalysation* of the Australian Aquarian New Agers of my generation – and, following his example, to *serve in whatever way was needed*.

## **Fred Robinson and 'Change'**

On leaving ROTA Fred had to work out how he would interact with 'the world' he thought he had left. Before exploring his changes, and his ideas about 'change' itself, it is useful to review the changes Fred had already made since his embrace of Social Credit's tenets precipitated by the Great Depression – when he had *been forcibly shot out of the rat race*, something he regarded as *'the best thing that ever happened to me once I got over the initial shock of losing the farm'* (Fred Robinson, pers. comm., 1970s).

During the first few years of Fred's seventeen years of association with ROTA – *out of the world* as he so aptly depicted it – he made a number of massive personal changes. His own *lifestyle-change-experiences* shaped his life thereafter. Fred was over forty when he first came in contact with Ione and Parcæ Long, so he was at quite a different

point in his life from most of those who joined the Universal Brotherhood in the 1970s. Fred had been brought up to be a modest little English hat-and-tails gentleman. He had been a smoker since his rebellious and disobedient youth. He had married and fathered six children. He was an independent person, even somewhat irreligious. He had a sharp sense of humour and was not beyond swearing.

Within the space of a few years he lost his farm, moved into the bush, built a humpy, became a dedicated worker for the Social Credit Movement, and then a neophyte of a Rosicrucian Sect. Soon he was wearing nothing except for working gloves, boots and hat – toting a hoe. He had turned vegetarian virtually overnight, and stopped smoking *cold pumpkin*. It wasn't long before he took the solemn vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Poverty was part of life since the Depression – nothing had changed there; but he was also thrust into chastity – not an easy ask for a vital man like Fred. Then he was obliged to be obedient to Parcaë his Prelate – a person he couldn't stand from the beginning, but the person who was married to the *spiritual teacher* he worshipped – if not loved. These changes were a huge challenge for this pioneer of the Age of Aquarius, but one he felt *called* to meet, despite the havoc it would cause within his family.

As a penniless, celibate, obedient, vegetarian, non-smoking, naked monk, working twenty hours a day in this Aquarian Order, Fred could certainly speak from personal experience about '*change*'. In fact by the time I met him he was obsessed with its necessity and urgency. It was his mantra – and it was contagious. A few 'students' were to contract Fred's *change-disease* in the 1950s; Mary Broun caught it in the 1960s, while I and many more others succumbed to it in the 1970s. Often during the Universal Brotherhood years changes were made without compelling reasons to do so. I remember citing Fred's saying: '*the only thing constant is change*' almost as a rationale for changes which only made life more difficult for everyone – but seemed like a good idea at the time.

While Fred did work extraordinarily long hours he was at various times a voracious and fast reader, a skill he had perhaps gained from his boyhood love of reading science-fiction. At his Depression affected farm, and then in his humpy at Lake Weyba, he read much while *investigating what was wrong with the world economic system* via

the Douglas Credit Movement. He was soon reading Heindel's *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conceptions* (1909), and in the process discovering *the Truth about God and the Universe* and how we should live according to *Cosmic Law* via Ione and Parcaë Long's brand of naked Rosicrucianism.

One thing is certain: Fred did so much reading he neglected his wife and children. This is often a problem for those investigating religious organisations. It is easy for a neophyte to become immersed in, and obsessed by, the 'truth' they feel they are encountering. One of the problems of New Religious Movements is that the initial intensity experienced at the time of first contact, seems to override all else. The amount of reading that needs to be done to just *get up to speed* with the others in the group can be very demanding, especially on top of the work one feels obliged to undertake – to play one's part in the movement. There may be no intention on the part of the group to 'brainwash' or even 'convert' anyone; only the *responsibility to share the truth*, a sacred trust which Fred felt and exercised when he was asked a question by a *sincere seeker of truth*. While the idea of conversion is anathema in many New Age circles, the enthusiastic involvement of a neophyte often causes stress to build up in them.

While not usually compulsory, the recommended but ultimately self-imposed rigours and disciplines of a NRM Community (with founders and leaders as exemplars) can involve long, intense, and regular services or prayer meetings; purification regimes that may include fasting; fitness sessions to ensure the body is balanced; orientation lectures and personal meetings designed to explain both the culture and the particular understandings of the group; and then times of silence to inwardly contemplate the new life. In combination with these factors is juggled *the needs of the moment* – *The Work* – which the sincere Seeker wants to undertake as a contribution to the cause of which they are newly enamoured. Sleep deprivation can often be the result – just as it is for many enthusiastic, driven personnel trying to get ahead in worldly careers. I suggest it is this same compulsive *workaholic* syndrome at play, rather than the result of a sinister 'cult brainwashing' plot designed to ensnare the innocent and unsuspecting seeker.

Fred Robinson's dedication to the '*The Work*' was inspiring to me and others who met him and joined with him to accomplish his *Alternative Society* vision. Fred's testimony that '*twenty hours a day was never enough to do what needed to be done*' led me to at times display a super intensity which too often became imbalanced, and occasionally – in the name of dedication – roamed the margins of fanaticism. Such intense dedication was certainly modelled by Fred Robinson. On reflection, nearly forty years on, it is clear that this intensity afflicted most people who lived in the Universal Brotherhood for any length of time. Such is the climate where dedication to an almost impossible ideal is hot-housed in a 24/7 *way of life*. In a sentence, we took it all too seriously.

## **The Temple Address**

The question 'How did Fred come to be a prophet?' was one that was difficult to answer – for there was nothing to suggest anything about prophecy in the only extant literature of the Queensland Gymnosophical Society and its Community. However, by searching under 'Rosicrucian' and then 'Queensland' in the National Library (Canberra) I discovered an undated text titled 'Temple Address: The Inauguration of National Prayer for the Preservation of the British Empire and Protection of Australia'. Without an author, this publication included some photographs, with the caption 'INTERIOR ROSICRUCIAN ORDER SYMBOLIC TEMPLE, BRISBANE'. It can be easily deduced that this was the interior of the Borva Street silver domed temple and (from the content of the address) that it was written after Fred had made contact with the Longs (early in 1936). The three centimetre 'logo' on the otherwise clear back page featured a naked lady balancing on a ball while holding a chalice with the word 'YOUTH' superimposed in white over the vessel – a semiotic giveaway that this text emanated from these gymnosophical *ROTarians*, and (although impossible to verify) was likely to have been written by Parcæ and Ione Long. The following excerpts, amongst other things, make clear where Fred first came in touch with the Biblical prophecy he explained to baby-boomers in the 1970s; while also revealing the genesis of the idea that a 'spiritual wave' jumped from California to Eastern Australia – and later by extension to Perth. The opening paragraph (which I have included in full) also explains why Fred had told me that two 'Great Masters', Solomon and Hiram Abiff, were vital to

‘*bringing in the New Age*’. I simply ignored this sort of thing, seeing such information as beyond me. Fred didn’t mind – after all it was *an action cycle*.

The world is rushing headlong into chaos, blinded by rampant Personal Power. Biblical and Pyramid Prophecies confront us with the facts which it is our privilege to comprehend in prescience, and our duty to act upon in co-operation with the Higher Powers, and our Grand Masters, Solomon (Jesus) – the Church, and Hiram Abiff (Christian Rosenkreuz) – Freemasons, that the world may be safely piloted through this, the most critical and serious crisis in our whole history, threatening its very existence. Let us therefore face the facts as they are Cosmically and Terrestrially developing (Temple Address, Brisbane Rosicrucian Order, p. 1).

The phrases ‘rushing headlong into chaos’, ‘the most critical and serious crisis in our whole history’, and ‘let us therefore face the facts...’ were all recycled later. In what follows, the author(s) describe in some detail the way in which ‘the Spiritual Wave responsible for Man’s ‘Spiritual education’ had moved from the East from the time of Confucius, spreading West until arriving in California – where The Rosicrucian Fellowship had fortuitously established its headquarters. Fred often spoke about this leap:

Leaping the Pacific (as foretold by Max Heindel) from the West Coast of America, the spiritual path of this Spiritual Wave leads directly to the East Coast of Australia, thereby clearly indicating that Australia must lead the world civilisation in the New Era. Brisbane (153 deg. E. Long.) is almost due East, and the Rosicrucian Order consequently transferred from the Northern Hemisphere and established its headquarters in Brisbane, to enable the work of setting the standards for the Aquarian Age to be accomplished ...

Evolution is spirally progressive and the new Spiritual Wave to be inaugurated in Australia will establish the commencement of an entirely new order of things, not merely from a new Zodiacal Sign Control, but from the major Cosmic Cycle basis ... (ibid.).

The author throughout this article insists that there is a clear link between the cosmic forces of the universe and terrestrial happenings, here making a link between future sun spot activity and an important, but mysterious world change:

Between 1986–88 several of the major planets will in conjunction shut off much of the Sun’s Life Force. All are familiar with terrestrial reaction to Sun-spot activity, and scientific records have been compiled conclusively demonstrating that crises in the world history have coincided with major Sun-Spot activity, but science possesses no record of an activity of such magnitude as the Cosmic conditions of 1986–88 will create (ibid).



Far-in-the-future-prophecies like these were much easier for onlookers to appreciate. Shorter term ones like the following could go awfully wrong, even if they began well, looking as though they might work out:

The aspect next to consider is the culmination of Biblical Prophecy. By Pyramid computation the 15<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> September 1936 would mark the inauguration of Universal Peace and Goodwill among men. Armageddon then ending war ... In July 1935 international war seemed inevitable, but natural forces brought into operation in place of war enabled war to be averted (Temple Address, Brisbane Rosicrucian Order, p. 2).

This sort of prophecy would have been popular in 1937 and 1938 when Chamberlain seemed to be averting War, but not so in 1939.

One other idea which Fred proposed in the 1970s, and is also mentioned in this Temple Address, is the idea of a shift in the earth's axis. The following paragraph was undoubtedly the genesis of this concept. Notice how the *scientised* geometry of the text is combined with the last two unscientific words.

Geologically, it has been proven that at one time the climatic conditions at the Polar Regions were tropical, yet no change in the 23 ½ deg. angle of inclination of the Earth's axis to the Ecliptic has been observed since Atlantean days. A symbolic geometrical figure, still preserved as sacred by the Hopi Indians, shows that at one time the angle of inclination was 14 deg. which means that the change was produced by a sudden roll over. Conditions are rapidly building up for another roll over (ibid.).

The conditions that would bring about this 'roll over' were to be movement of the continental masses 'by seismic disturbance, thereby altering the Earth's Centre of Gravity'; while the 'combined gravitational pull of the massed major planets' was to be seen as 'operating in a similar manner to that by which the Moon draws the tides', the combination judged as 'the final "straw" causing the roll over' (ibid.).

The intensity of the devotional and prayer regime 'inaugurated by the Order on September 16<sup>th</sup> 1936 (without knowledge of the Pyramidal importance of the date)' (ibid.), can be observed in the following extracts of a longer list of activities that were to be undertaken by 'every Rosicrucian Order Aspirant of Initiation in the World' (ibid.). These activities were listed as:

- a) The Temple was to remain open to 'the Public' on Sundays until 6.30 pm;
- b) Devotional services were to include 'intense prayers' taking the form of 'National Prayer for the preservation of the British Empire and the protection of Australia';

- c) Every Aspirant was ‘to direct his private prayers and work intensely in every possible way’ to establish universal Peace and Good-Will among men;
- d) The production of a Mystery Play would instruct people in ‘the operation of natural and Divine law to provide conclusive proof of reincarnation’;
- e) On November 1<sup>st</sup> 1936 ‘the Symbolic Act of breaking the War Sword was definitely arranged to be performed’ (Temple Address, Brisbane Rosicrucian Order, p. 2).<sup>145</sup>

This last date places the text between September 16<sup>th</sup> and November 1<sup>st</sup>. The final paragraph attempts to sum up and stress the path to protection in unstable world conditions – a path which these Rosicrucians well-knew and were prepared to promote to the general population:

All these conditions accurately fulfil the statement of Holy Writ and National Prayer in accordance therewith is Britain’s only protection, and the fact that Australia (Aquaria) is the Promised Land (Palestine being the scene of Armageddon) is of supreme importance to Australian who in self preservation must spiritualise their activities, work in line with Divine laws and thereby invoke Divine protection (ibid).

## **Part 4: Fred the Wandering Sage**

There is very little detail about Fred’s movements from after he left ROTA, sometime in the early 1950s, until he met Mary Broun in Western Australia in late 1962. The following account is based on what Fred himself told me he was doing during this period, supplemented by information contained in quotations within extant print media articles. Some of this information was confirmed by his contemporaries during the 1970s and ’80s when I met them in conjunction with my role in the Universal Brotherhood, while other facts have been verified or supplemented by those who knew him or were children of his ‘students’ during this period. Unfortunately almost all of the primary *alignees* had died by the time I began this research, so it is almost impossible to work out the exact order in which the events covered took place. In 1953 Fred was back at ROTA for an unknown period of time, assisting his son Richard with the ongoing problems with the authorities concerning William ‘Parcæ’ Long.

The only detailed records of Fred’s life during this period are in connection with the time he spent in the Cairns and Atherton Tablelands district. The first of these records

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<sup>145</sup> This is derived from the Old Testament: ‘And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground: and I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely’ (Hosea 2:18, KJV).

come from an interview with the disapproving husband of one of Fred's female students. I include this interview in full as it reveals how antagonistic 'outsiders' saw Fred Robinson during this period. The second is from an official file of ASIO, Australia's Security and Intelligence Organisation.

## More Revealed Knowledge

Fred's own account in *Earth Garden* suggests that when he first left ROTA in 1950 he spent a year on a biodynamic farm:

... it was about 1950, yes just over twenty years ago. At that time I went and spent about 12 months with Thea Hughes up through the Blue Mountains out of Sydney, up at Kurrajong. She was running a Bio-Dynamic farm, and I found she was in difficulties and that was my first real acquaintance with the Biodynamic work. I didn't go into it scientifically but I went helping them make compost (February 1972, p. 34).

Here Fred Robinson read the spiritual books he was so engaged with, and worked half-days on the Hughes' farm for his keep. It is most likely that it was during this year he read a book which he regarded as his next step – after *Social Credit* (Douglas 1927, revised 1933), *The History of the Origin of All Things* (Arnold 1852), and *The Rosicrucian Cosmo Conception* (Heindel 1909) – a book of 'Revealed Knowledge' which would supply him with an enhanced feeling of mission. *Oahspe: A Kosmon Bible* (1883) was the sacred text which, more than any other was to define his life thereafter.

It is also sure Fred had close contact with a 'Faithist' group (the name that readers of *Oahspe* give to those who follow its teachings). I was to meet Hans Delmar, the Sydneysider most likely to have introduced Fred to *Oahspe*, and who was importing the book and selling it at cost to those interested. Fred became a priest/celebrant for a group of Faithists sometime in the mid-1950s, for he told me he performed funerals and marriages and other rites. *A Kosmon Church Service Book* (1920) that Fred gave me has a Eulogy, written in Fred's handwriting, for a woman (Louisa Heyman) stuck to the back page. Along with other markings in the book, these corroborate Fred's statement to me that he had been a Faithist celebrant. Just how involved he was or for how long is hard to ascertain; but his dedication to the main aim and object of the first convention of Faithists (1883) – which he undoubtedly read – is certain. He tried for the rest of his life to fulfil that object:

The object is ... to raise up the children where they shall not witness drunkenness, crime, and profanity; where they may be taught, on the kindergarten system, all kinds of trades and useful occupations, with a time to sing, a time to dance, a time to play, a time to work, and a time to pray. They will be taught the universal brotherhood, and to have faith in Jehovih, their creator; to be non-resistants, to abjure war, to practise the commandments and to do good ... In fact, the plan described in *Oahspe*, the new Bible, will be carried out (<http://archives.nmsu.edu/exhibits/shalam2/>, accessed 10.3.2011).

## The Invalid New Age Missionary

Having come to terms with the dramatic personal dramas surrounding his decision to leave ROTA; having helped Thea Hughes on her farm; having read and absorbed *Oahspe's* message, and making a connection with existing Faithists in Sydney, Fred Robinson decided he would *share the revealed knowledge he had collated with those who were seeking and asking for the truth*. Fred did not have a conscious strategy for doing this. He described his plan to me as '*following God's Plan day by day*' (pers. comm., 1970s). In the disjointed but free-flowing *Earth Garden* interview (February 1972, p. 35) Fred intimates that he began this New Age mission straight after his time at Kurrajong: 'For the last twenty-two years [making it 1950] I've been out on my own, until I married Mary nine years ago, but I've been wandering up and down between Cairns and Adelaide' (ibid.). It does seem that Fred did have a rhythm to his missionary work – one based on the weather; he would go north to Cairns in the winter and south as far as Adelaide in the summer/autumn. On one of his yearly stays in Cairns – the place that became his base until he moved to Perth – Fred had another life-changing experience.

At some time in the early 1950s, likely to have been 1952 or '53, Fred suffered a debilitating blood disease, which he believed was the result of aluminium cooking utensils. The following confirms the circumstances:

Before I got the aged pension I had the invalid pension. Because of my ignorance about cooking in aluminium I nearly died. Very, very nearly died. I was on the verge of passing out. And I was certified as an incurable invalid for life, by the medical profession in Queensland ... I had that two pounds ...[later] four pounds a week, it was ample (Fred Robinson, in *Earth Garden*, February 1972, p. 35).

I recall being present at Shalam during an unannounced visit by a couple of Jehovah's Witnesses on their proselytising round in 1972. Fred, who liked to try to enlighten both Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses, complimented these visitors on their campaigns

against the use of aluminium cooking utensils and told them how he was forever indebted to the Jehovah's Witnesses. Fred had often spoken in lectures about how someone came to his bed in hospital, handed him a tract, and without uttering a word walked out – never to be seen again. This tract, he told these visitors, was circulated by the Jehovah's Witnesses: '*That little tract saved my life. I discharged myself from hospital, threw my aluminium pots in the creek, and gradually got better*' (Fred Robinson, lectures, 1970s).

Fred saw his receipt of the *Invalid Pension* for life as providential, for it enabled him to continue his New Age mission without having to earn an income.<sup>146</sup> This pension made it possible for Fred to say to his audiences: '*I haven't worked for money for forty years!*' This idea offended some – but not the *countercultural* New Age audience of the 1970s, who saw it as an accomplishment worth emulating. Fred's distinction between 'working for a living' and 'working for money' made an impact on his younger audiences, conferring validity on their unpaid back-to-the-land ventures, and justifying them as worthy of governmental support via Unemployment Benefits.

### **Flying Saucer Clubs and Lecturing Round**

In Cairns in the mid-1950s Fred helped to start a Flying Saucer Club. From his verbatim *Earth Garden* interview it seems likely that this was around the time of his health crisis, for directly after explaining his receipt of the Invalid Pension he states:

And, at that time I got back up to Cairns. I was running a Flying Saucer group at that time. To me it was very urgent that people should get to know the truth about that as well as the economy (February 1972, p. 35).

True to form Fred had not become an official office bearer in this club, leaving it to others to do the organising. He did not pursue his earlier political connection with the Social Credit Movement either, yet he expounded their teachings, such as the A+B theorem. He was still trying to explain this theorem to the baby-boomer generation, but

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<sup>146</sup> The Invalid Pension scheme was introduced in 1910. These payment programs focussed assistance on those with no income and no capacity to work. In 1945 a Special Benefit scheme provided for people who had no other entitlement and were unable to provide for themselves. It was tightly means tested [http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/seniors/progserv/PensionReview/Documents/pension\\_review/appf.htm](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/seniors/progserv/PensionReview/Documents/pension_review/appf.htm), accessed 17.6.2010).

with very little success – I for one never really understood it, and doubt there were many that did.<sup>147</sup>

On Fred's *many tours up and down the Eastern Seaboard* Fred spoke to small home groups such as Flying Saucer Clubs and Vegetarian Societies. These two in particular were an important part of Fred's 'network'. Known as an authority on both UFOs and Vegetarianism, Fred was often invited to speak at their meetings; typically he enjoyed speaking about UFOs to the Vegetarian Societies, and about Vegetarianism to the Flying Saucer Clubs. He also spoke about *Oahspe* to everyone – for it combined both these subjects – along with the need to form *Oahspean* styled Communities '*away for the centres of pollution where the New Age children currently being born onto the planet can be brought up in an atmosphere of purity of body, mind and spirit*' (Fred Robinson, lectures, 1970s). Fred's manta from the 1950s until he died was '*you can't mix purity and pollution*'.

The following remembrance of two child witnesses of Fred Robinson's talks from the late 1950s through the 1960s corroborates my thinking that Fred, while not active in any particular UFO group, was actively involved with the members of some of the clubs – and well-known to the relatively small number of Australians who had more than a passing interest in UFOs.

... So, for the time Romana and I spent with Fred Robinson in the Botanic gardens way back in the '60s I think. We were about 10–13 years old. At first from what we can recall Fred came on his own and may have come with Fred Stone. Did you know him? (Monica Knobloch, email 20.10.2010).

This recollection places Fred Robinson as an associate of Fred Stone in the early 1960s. Stone and Robinson however had very different UFO agendas. Fred Stone was focussed

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<sup>147</sup> The A+B theorem is probably the simplest, yet most controversial, of all of Douglas's ideas. The theorem is a truism. The controversy lies in the nature of the 'B payments' which Douglas identified. The theorem is stated by Douglas as follows:

In any manufacturing undertaking the payments made may be divided into two groups: Group A: Payments made to individuals as wages, salaries, and dividends; Group B: Payments made to other organisations for raw materials, bank charges and other external costs. The rate of distribution of purchasing power to individuals is represented by A, but since all payments go into prices, the rate of generation of prices cannot be less than A plus B. Since A will not purchase A plus B, a proportion of the product at least equivalent to B must be distributed by a form of purchasing power which is not comprised in the description grouped under A (C.H. Douglas 1931, *The Monopoly of Credit*) (<http://social-credit.blogspot.com/2007/10/douglass-ab-theorem.html>, accessed 23.9.2010).

on sightings and proof, while Fred Robinson addressed questions about why UFOs were here, and championed the most presumptuous answers – especially those regarding what might be done by a *ground crew to help these* [always benign] *Elder Brothers to rebalance the planet*. While Fred had been a catalyst to some UFO club members; he was also an irritant to most UFO club leaders like Fred Stone. The history of UFO groups in Australia records that after Edger Jarrold's Australian Flying Saucer Bureau (a Sydney group) had collapsed in February 1955

the most prominent and first to re-build was under the Directorship of Fred Stone ... Stone formed the *Australian Flying Saucer Research Society* (AFSRS) based in Adelaide ... while also seeing the chance for his South Australian organisation to become the governing body of all Australian Ufology ... ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australian\\_ufology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australian_ufology), accessed 20.10.2010).

Fred Stone was certainly one of the main movers and shakers of the UFO groups in Australia during the late 1950s and '60s. Fred Robinson's absence from current UFO historical records is explained firstly by his reluctance to be actively or officially involved with any organisation – and secondly by his 'spiritualised message' and his championing of George Adamski, the most well-publicised *contactee* in the world – someone who had a *cult following*, but was not helpful to the more scientific researchers:

The most prominent figure in the contactee world in the late 1950s was without doubt George Adamski. His tales of meeting Venusians, Martians and Saturnians turned Adamski into an international celebrity. He was revered by followers and reviled by critics. Some of his most prominent critics came from the ranks of the serious UFO researchers who were seeking to legitimise the study of UFOs. Unfortunately for them, Adamski and other contactees were a great help to those seeking to ridicule the whole field (Chalker 1996, p. 89).

Adamski's 1959 visit had a mixed response. While there was interest, especially in 'the benevolent nature of his "space brothers" ... many of the main groups were already realising the damage caused by his dubious claims' (ibid.). Fred, fully aligned with Adamski, upheld this contactee's story for the rest of his life. Fred Robinson's influence within the national flying saucer groups was minimal, although he is likely to have maintained an influence amongst some members of the Queensland group, even after Adamski's visit which

attracted wide debate and ridicule, and reportedly there were efforts to stop him showing his photographic material. The Queensland Flying Saucer Research Bureau was one of the few to maintain an ongoing affection for Adamski and his contactee credo (Chalker 1996, p. 90).

Fred was somewhat of a pariah to those who were trying to do flying saucer research, and run organisations in traditional ways. While a guest speaker at many groups after he left ROTA, he was not to be a member of any group (except as a free lance celebrant of the *Oahspean* Faithists). I remember Fred telling me he knew there were *people in high places* who knew the truth about Flying Saucers, but for various reasons did not speak out about them. He would finish such a conversation with one of his favourite injunctions: '*don't you know that truth is the enemy of society Stephen* (pers. comm., 1970s). It is likely that one of the 'people high places' he was talking about was Lord Richard Gardiner Casey, or 'Baron Casey', as he was known.<sup>148</sup>

Fred was simply too outlandish in his claims, and too publicly outspoken to be seen as representative of the UFO organisations. While Fred's name may not be recorded as being part of any official UFO organisation, he was certainly the most vocal travelling *UFO salesman* in Australia during the late 1950s, and then when Mary accompanied him, they became Australia's most dedicated. He spoke at all sorts of events from public lectures, to informal family picnic-meetings, the type of which is recalled by a child attendee of the time:

Mum and us three children would catch the bus into town on a Saturday or Sunday morning. The meeting started about 11am in the Adelaide Botanic Gardens in the middle somewhere at one of the rotundas. Usually it was a lovely sunny day occasionally rainy. Us five children [with her two cousins] played on the grass and then would go and listen for a while to Fred. He was in Adelaide about two or three times a year I think. It seemed that way. Romana [Monica's cousin] and I found it fascinating and loved listening to Fred. He spoke about flying saucers and how they were going to come down to Earth, and I think, save us. Flying saucers was his main topic that I remember. We enjoyed our time at the Botanic Gardens. Then Mary came along as well. They were travelling around in their Kombi van. At some point they stayed with Fred and Edith [Romana's parents] as well. Mum, Fred and Edith always went to the meetings when Fred Robinson was in town (Monica Knobloch, email, 20.10.2010).

Through his guest-speaker network, which included Spiritualist/mediumistic circles as well as the readers of *Oahspe*, Fred was able to build a small but dedicated group of

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<sup>148</sup> Baron Casey was a member of one of the first UFO research groups in Australia, the *Aeronautics & Phenomena Research Victoria* (APRV). His time as Minister in charge of the CSIRO and as Minister for External Affairs enabled him to act as a conduit between governmental research, the public, and public enthusiast clubs ... In 1965 the Queen, on Menzies' recommendation, appointed Casey Governor-General. Casey's interest in UFOs remained with him until his death in June 1976 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baron\\_Casey#Governor-General](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baron_Casey#Governor-General), accessed, 20.10.2010).



*alignees* in all States except Western Australia and Tasmania. As I understand it he developed a round which he would visit annually, if not more often.

In the Dandenong Ranges in about 1957 Fred read *The Urantia Book* which had been published in 1955 and had come to Australia in 1956. He saw this book as the *latest book of Revealed Knowledge to be given to the Planet*. Fred told me that once he started reading it he did little else until he finished it. He was soon importing these books by the case from the Chicago based publishers, The Urantia Foundation. Through his network he introduced many of his students to this book, taking orders until he had enough for another case of books. He saw this *Urantia Book* importing as a service to his fellow ‘seekers’. He said he made no profit – just enough to cover the importing costs.

I also know that Fred was very involved in the anti-Fluoride Campaigns of the 1950s.<sup>149</sup> It was during this period that fluoridation was accepted by dental scientists and others, and delivered through many civic water supplies. There is however ongoing debate about the issue of fluoridation, with a significant amount of recent scientific literature supporting the position of the 1950s anti-fluoridation campaign, one of Fred Robinson’s most energetic social concerns.

When Fred spoke on this subject to the 1970s baby-boomers, it was seen as yet another incidence of social control, supporting the evidence for the broader and overarching conspiracy theory which Fred believed was behind almost all injustice. For instance he believed that *good young dental students were being taught to believe that which the powers that be wanted them to believe*. Fluoridation of public water supplies is

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<sup>149</sup> Since the 1950s, most major dental and medical associations have strongly supported fluoridation, and likewise most dentists and doctors. In the face of the near-unanimous expert support for fluoridation, the popular opposition drew the attention of social scientists. There have been hundreds of accounts of fluoridation struggles, including dozens of serious social scientific analyses of the issue. Much of the work has been on the sociology of opposition to fluoridation: how to explain popular resistance to a measure that experts attested was highly beneficial and without any known risks (<http://www.uow.edu.au/~bmartin/pubs/89sq.html>, accessed 17.6.2009).

still a contentious issue – not just within fringe protest groups with alternative health agendas, but also within dental science.<sup>150</sup>

Fred found another spiritual teacher during this period: Sydney Cadman, who lived in the Melbourne area. I have been unable to find much information about Cadman, other than that Fred followed *Syd's guidance* for a period from the mid-1950s, seeing him as an 'adept' or 'initiate'. Cadman left virtually no traceable footprint. He had no family to pay for his funeral and was buried at the State's expense in a pauper's grave in 1964 (Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages).

While there is undoubtedly more anecdotal material to be collected of Fred's time as a *Wandering Sage*, it is the last period from about 1958 in Cairns and on the Atherton Tablelands district of Northern Queensland which is most accessible. It is clear that Fred made this area his base, at least in the years leading up to his move to Western Australia. While travelling to the Eastern States cities during the summer months, partly to lecture and partly to recruit for communal ventures always on the boil, Fred would return to Northern Queensland for the winter months.

From 1958 I have been able to verify that Fred ministered to a group of *students* who listened to his teachings and tried to put them into practice through the establishment of an *Oahspe* inspired *Fraternity/Community* – but still with a gymnosophical component. He initiated a Community on Mt. Misery, a venture that failed – miserably. The details of Fred's life in Northern Queensland are teased out via the following interview with a man who was married to a student of Fred's.

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<sup>150</sup> The fluoridation issue is still very much alive. Amongst a group of professionals calling for an end to water fluoridation is Professor Mark Diesendorf who says: 'Fluoridation has been discontinued or never implemented in most of Europe. Now in only six countries of the world are the majority of people forced to drink fluoridated water: USA, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, Columbia and Singapore. Sadly, in these countries fluoridation is promoted by unscientific propaganda by dental and medical associations that prematurely endorsed fluoridation back in the 1950s. Fluoridation is a violation of medical ethics, since it is mass medication with an uncontrolled dose. Fluoridation is a medication because it is used to treat people, not to make the water safer to drink, and because it is not an essential nutrient ([www.sustainabilitycentre.com.au](http://www.sustainabilitycentre.com.au), accessed 17.6.2010). Another site where a number of other professionals make comments against the introduction of fluoride can be found at [http://www.thehealthvine.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=43&Itemid=56](http://www.thehealthvine.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=43&Itemid=56), accessed 17.6.2010).

## Claude and Tine Harm

A question and answer interview conducted with Marlene Harm, the daughter of Claude and Tine Harm (who were married at the time they met Fred), has helped fill in gaps in the life of Fred Robinson. I emailed questions to Marlene, who took notes of the answers and emailed them back to me. She occasionally gives additional or contextual information, explaining for instance that ‘My father said this. I just added comments to clarify some things’ (Marlene Harm, email, 10.3.2010).

Claude Harm provides one of the only primary research interviews from among Fred Robinson’s acquaintances during the late 1950s and early 1960s. His data confirm information gleaned elsewhere, and help fill gaps in Fred’s Northern Queensland years, verifying that the Cairns and Atherton Tablelands district had become Fred’s home base from about 1958 until he travelled to Perth in November of 1962. Fred returned four (perhaps five) times to this district in the following 12 years, taking Mary with him on all but one of these occasions, suggesting that his links to this district were strong.

## The Interview

**Stephen Carthew:** Could I have your own date and place of birth please?

**Claude Harm:** Mt Morgan [South West of Rockhampton] 24<sup>th</sup> December 1908.

**Marlene Harm:** Dad died just short of his hundredth birthday, but I managed to get this information on one of our last occasions together.

**S.C.:** When did you meet Fred Robinson?

**C.H.:** 1958 or so.

**M.H.:** I was born in 1957, and I remember Fred quite clearly, so he must have been very unusual. Maybe it was his robes?

**S.C.:** Did you know anything about Fred’s background prior to arriving in Cairns?

**C.H.:** No, but the *Sunday Truth* did.

**S.C.:** What were the circumstances of meeting him?

**C.H.:** Morrie and Corrie had a stone hut on our farm that Fred helped build.

Morrie and Corrie Bekker were also close friends of Tine Harm. All three were ‘students’ of Fred Robinson.

**S.C.:** Over what period of time did you know Fred?

**C.H.:** 1958 for about 4 or 5 years. *The Sunday Truth* paper came out to get a photo of the supposed nudist colony on our farm and took a photo of Corrie behind a bush. For ages after this everybody was then asking me about the nudist colony on my farm.

That Fred was still practising naturism in the Communities he initiated in the late 1950s and into the 1960s, suggests it was Mary Robinson who influenced him to desist, disregarding, if not repudiating, ROTA’s gymnosophical life style.

**S.C.:** Did you get on well with Fred?

**C.H.:** No. I practically never spoke to him because he was a bludger. He was good for his age, but had a harem and often rode from Cairns to my farm, 18 miles.

Notwithstanding his invalid pension for life, by 1958 Fred was evidently particularly healthy for his age. The use of the word ‘bludger’ is most probably derived from Fred’s receipt of a pension while actually appearing fit and well. The idea that ‘Fred had a harem’ is anomalous. It was clear however that Fred was both good-looking and charismatic through his sixties. I have gathered from conversations I had with Tine Harm in the early 1980s (when she visited the UBI Community) that some women ‘seekers’ were drawn to Fred’s teachings and to him as an unusual, atypical Australian – a kind of *renaissance man*. Fred certainly often extolled women’s ‘intuitive’ capacities, and told me that those who could comprehend his message were mainly women. It is therefore likely that that Fred’s ‘students’ in Northern Queensland were mainly women, and thus understandable that Claude Harm would consider that Fred had a ‘harem’. While it is possible Fred had sexual relations with his ‘students’ it is just as likely that Fred’s vow of chastity, as ‘Brother Fred’ of the Rosicrucian Order of the Aquarians, was to continue to be an important plank in his programme. Certainly in his verbal biographical sketching to me in the 1970s, he told me he had been a celibate teacher until he met his soul mate Mary Broun.

**C.H.:** He was supported by Farquarson (an invalid who lived nearby in Redlynch). He was associated with Gordon Clarke and Underwood (a builder) and Dr Wright. They held ‘healing meetings’. Tine walked miles and crossed flooded rivers to get to these, then came home through the pouring rain, through the floods, wading through and swimming flooded creeks, and through the rainforest late at night to get home.

‘Healing meetings’ provided another network which Fred tapped during his travels. While never claiming to be a healer himself, these spiritual healing groups invited spiritual lecturers, drawing like-minded seekers to them.

**M.H.:** This was when I was 5 to 10 so 1962 to 1967. Mum did the most terrifying things to get to these meetings – stripped off and crossed flooded streams up to her neck among the eels and snakes, and crossed train bridges to get over the floods late at night, and then walked through pitch dark rainforest alone in a remote area leaving the old truck parked on high ground – no mobile phones those days, and no company or support from dad (just disgust and derision).

The period spoken about here was during the years Fred was living at Shalam in Western Australia, and returning to Cairns occasionally to lecture and try to instigate another Community. I suspect that the actual period may have begun a little earlier.

**S.C.:** If, as I already suspect, you didn’t like Fred, what was it that you specifically did not like about him?

**C.H.:** Just a big bludger.

**S.C.:** Did you recognise any good qualities? If so what were they?

**C.H.:** Good at bludging.

**S.C.:** What, in your opinion was Fred doing in Cairns?

**C.H.:** Looking for a free place to stay. Tine used to feed them.

I suspect the ‘them’ were the group of Fred’s students and those who were considering starting a Community based on *Oahspean* principles.

**S.C.:** Did it seem he was on a mission?

**C.H.:** Huh !!!!!

Claude Harm’s response to this question indicates that the idea of Fred being on a spiritual mission was not recognised as a valid question.

**S.C.:** Did he hold public meetings?

**C.H.:** Yes trying to find followers and raise funds for the commune.

This comment corroborates Fred’s story that he was trying to start communal ventures up in this district during the late 1950s and early 1960s.

**S.C.:** Did Fred talk about any of the following ... please comment?  
About Rosicrucianism?

**C.H.:** Not to me.

**M.H.:** Wonder why?

**S.C.:** About Gymnosophy?

**C.H.:** Not to me.

**S.C.:** To your knowledge was Fred a practising naturist in Cairns?

**C.H.:** Yes on our farm.

**M.H.:** I remember Dad showing people Corrie's picture for years after in a spirit of sensationalism.

**S.C.:** About Flying Saucers?

**C.H.:** All the time. So did Tine.

**S.C.:** About the Age of Aquarius being imminent?

**C.H.:** Not with me, only Tine.

**S.C.:** About the dangers of fluoride?

**C.H.:** No, but Tine used to march in protest to fluoride.

This last comment corroborates Fred's story to me that he helped organise protests about '*the mass poisoning of our water supply with sodium fluoride*' (lectures, 1970s).

**S.C.:** About the dangers of Aluminium cooking utensils?

**C.H.:** Not to me, but Tine believed this.

**S.C.:** About the reasons for the Depression, Major Douglas, and Social Credit's theories; including the Economic Conspiracy he believed – The Elders of Zion or the International Bankers Conspiracy?

**C.H.:** Not to me.

**S.C.:** Did you go to his meetings? Were you involved at all in any of his activities?

**C.H.:** No, but I suppose the nude part would have been worth looking at.

**S.C.:** Did you know anything about him trying to start a Community. This is probably the most important issue for me. Mt. Misery was a place I think he started one. Morrie and Corrie Becker were involved? Comments please? Someone was said to 'run off with the money box' as Fred put it. Do you know anything of the circumstances?

**C.H.:** Fred rented a house on the Cairns Esplanade and they stopped there. Fred Robinson's Commune was going to buy our farm, where he had stayed on and off with the Bekkers. They held a meeting to organise finance to get people to finance the Commune but no-one turned up except Tine and me, but they weren't going to get any money out of me.

**M.H.:** Dad would not have wanted to go to the meeting; he just went for a sticky beak. He was always a really big sticky beak, right to the end.

**C.H.:** Anyway, two women from Melbourne were to supply money for the commune. There was a medium advising Fred what to do. She had the key to the bank safety deposit box. And her and the two university people cleared it out and went to New Zealand, so there was no money to buy our farm. Mt Poverty was too poor, the old truck loaded with timber to build a place broke down in our yard before it even got going, there was not enough money or goers to do all the work that needed to be done there.

Morrie and Corrie Bekker were the only live-in starters in Fred's attempt to build an *Oahspe* inspired Community on the slopes of Mt Misery (next to Mt Poverty),<sup>151</sup> during the late 1950s and up until early 1962. I was able to speak to Corrie Bekker in conjunction with an earlier research project.<sup>152</sup> She told me that she and her deceased husband had taken up a tin-mining lease on Mt Misery after the money for buying the Harm farm had been stolen. It took three hours in their Army Blitz four-wheel-drive to get up the mountain tracks; no one else came up to live there, even though Fred encouraged a number of people to visit. Fred had no intention of becoming part of this Community or being involved with its administration – something the Bekker's found difficult to comprehend. They subsequently gave up on the project when Fred went on an Eastern States trip to find more people (Corrie Bekker, telephone interview, 2006).

**S.C.:** What effect did Fred have on your marriage?

**C.H.:** Nothing on mine.

**M.H.:** I don't believe this, but dad would not be drawn on the subject – I think mum was always into unusual things, but this [Fred] either began it or cultivated it if it already existed or exaggerated an existing interest in all things spiritual, metaphysical and unusual for her time.

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<sup>151</sup> Mt Misery and Mt Poverty are between Daintree Village and Cooktown, inland from Bloomfield. For their exact location see page 7 of Australia's Tropical Rainforest World Heritage Magazine (2005-2006) [http://www.wettropics.gov.au/media/media\\_pdf/community\\_publications/magazines/wtma\\_mag\\_2005\\_2006.pdf](http://www.wettropics.gov.au/media/media_pdf/community_publications/magazines/wtma_mag_2005_2006.pdf), accessed 7.9.2011).

<sup>152</sup> An Honours Thesis titles *Fred Robinson, Theory and Me: A methodological meandering with an Australian hippie guru and his former 'alignee'* (2006).

The use of the impersonal pronouns ‘this’ and ‘it’ to describe the entrance of Fred Robinson into the life of Marlene’s mother Tine, is understandable. Fred Robinson was not a friend as such – he rather stood for ‘things’ of a spiritual nature that were surfacing in someone’s life. He stood for change; for *catalysation* or the *liberation* of a person’s latent but potent spiritual-self. The appearance of this powerful preacher in a family life often meant rupture of that family – as it did in Marlene’s family. Fred was not shy over precipitating family splits. He would even sometimes use Biblical verses to show that splits were necessary or inevitable if someone was to fulfil their destiny/calling.<sup>153</sup> This was, after all, how Fred had justified the impossible choice he gave his own family – one that was, in his family’s eyes, tantamount to ‘desertion’. Fred was often spoken about as ‘this thing’ – an *intervening force* in a person’s life. The fact that Fred wore his elaborate Rosicrucian bejewelled Cross (through to his death) set him apart immediately as someone different; someone on a mission.

**S.C.:** Fred, ‘Brother Fred’ as he perhaps was still known, had taken vows of poverty and chastity etc. Do you think he lived them?

**C.H.:** The poverty – yes – at other people’s expense. The chastity was only when he got older and couldn’t do it anymore – previous to that he had a harem.

**S.C.:** Was there any suggestion of a relationship between Fred and Tine? When did Tine and you split up? Did Fred have anything to do with the split?

**M.H.:** I was a bit uncomfortable about asking these questions, because I hated him saying awful things about my mother.

These were perhaps insensitive questions to ask, so it is understandable that Marlene felt uncomfortable about putting them to her father. The fact that Claude Harm had answered that Fred had no effect on his marriage, in answer to a previous question, gives no reason to suspect that Fred had an affair with his ‘student’, Tine.

**S.C.:** Why did Fred leave the district?

**C.H.:** To go over to Perth where there were more suckers after the North Queensland people woke up to him.

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<sup>153</sup> Examples of such quotes are: ‘The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law’ (Luke 12:53, KJV); and ‘Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead’ (Mathew 8:22, KJV).



**S.C.:** Did Tine and/or you see Fred and Mary when they came in 1967 to warn Australians about the end of the world?

**C.H.:** Tine would have for sure but not me.

I asked the following question of Marlene Harm:

**S.C.:** What effect did Fred Robinson have on your life?

**M.H.:** Nothing I can put my finger on directly, but more through his effect on Mum. Fred reinforced her ideas. She was a great peace-lover and she loved the idea of all living together and helping each other. She helped a lot of people, but when she wanted anyone to do anything for her she always seemed to be writing cheques. She was right into various health issues and conspiracy theories, which has been great for me. She was smarter than I ever gave her credit for. Dad gave her a difficult time because of her beliefs and practices. She was very generous and he was very tight. She loved helping young people, and he hated it (Marlene Harm, email, 10.3.2010).

This interview reveals the strength of feeling against the countercultural teachings and activities of Fred Robinson, especially amongst the sceptical husbands of Fred's mostly female students. Fred extolled the feminine aspect of religious experience – especially women's intuition. He was literally unable to talk about football, entertainment or anything that did not have a direct bearing on that which was vital to bringing the New Age down to earth. On this subject he would speak passionately – but only when asked. When he met the inquisitive 1970s New Age *information-sponges* he was in speaker's heaven. We had the questions which he had been preparing to answer since the 1940s.

## **Experiencing and Communicating the Dawn of Aquarius**

The over three thousand word verbatim interview between the editor of *Earth Garden* and Fred Robinson, from which the following text is taken, provides an example of how Fred spontaneously wove his own bio-historical experiences with the cosmic knowledge he expounded. His printed spoken-word responses to his engaged interviewer in this 'Honey is Money' article in the first issue of *Earth Garden* (February 1972, pp. 32–35), convey his colourful enthusiasm. Fred the white-haired octogenarian teacher and sage represents himself as a confident and lively communicator, a practising astrologer, and an original 'cosmic' New Age thinker – and a catalyst. The issues he broaches, while marginal for most people, are central to the mindset of New Agers with a penchant for a metaphysical, yet 'scientific' astronomically tabulated (albeit astrologically mediated) view of world changes.

Fred employs popular countercultural themes such as love of nature, down-to-earth organic gardening, and back-to-the-land perspectives to consciously bring the *Earth Garden* readership with him. The conversational yet dramatised *narrativisation* of the alignment of the planets – turning the astronomical event he described into a living, almost anthropomorphic *happening*, says much about Fred’s engaging oratorical style. The editor even lines up the nine planets to create a visual interlude that mimics Fred’s story about ‘the incredible intelligence of God’ (see following page). This planetary-alignment story is then sculpted into an argument for belief in God; one which Fred then aligns with nature, recommending that readers ‘work with the order and harmony of the Universe’.

**E.G.:** *Was there a cut off point where the Piscean Age finished and the Aquarian Age began?*

**F.R.:** Yes, I’ll give it to you very very specifically. I was up in Cairns at the time, and we were told there was going to be a full eclipse of the sun as viewed from New Guinea ... this is quite interesting, and it is all bound up with your good earth policy ... we had been told that the full eclipse of the sun, viewed from New Guinea, that would be at 9 a.m. eastern standard time, the fourth of February, 1962. I was down at the waterfront at Cairns, it was only half an eclipse as viewed from Cairns. But at that moment almost the whole solar system was lined up in the sign of Aquarius. There were ...

**E.G.:** [interrupts] *That was exactly ten years ago today [the interview took place on February 4, 1972].*

**F.R.:** So it is, so it is. Well, well, well, well. Well now, that is an omen, there’s a tremendous build up going on now in the work I’ve been engaged on for so long. I’ve been in this for 35 years as a full-time job. I haven’t worked for money since 1931. For the last twenty two years I’ve been out on my own, until I married Mary nine years ago, but I’ve been wandering up and down between Cairns and Adelaide. Before I got the age pension I had the invalid pension. Because of my ignorance about cooking in aluminium I nearly died. Very, very nearly died. I was right on the verge of passing

out. And I was certified an incurable invalid for life, by the medical profession in Queensland. I’m wandering up and down, I had that two pounds a week ... four pounds a week, it was ample. At the time I got back up to Cairns I was running a Flying Saucer group at that time . . . to me that was very urgent that people should get to know the truth about that as well as about the economy. And this business of passing out of the Piscean Age into the Aquarian Age, that was when that arose. I was back in Cairns and I had a terrific emotional experience as I watched at that moment, that moment of the full eclipse of the sun in New Guinea, I was probably the only man, perhaps in Australia for all I know, but certainly in north Queensland, who knew, that at that moment, we stepped right out of the Piscean Age into the full blast of the Aquarian Age. This is the thought that occurred to me as to the incredible working of the Universe. It was nearly 26,000 years ago since the last Aquarian Age . . . 25,920 I think . . . and there they were, all lined up for the start of the last Aquarian Age, all the planets in the solar system. They all start off, Mercury going around every eighty days, and then Venus, then the Earth and Mars and Jupiter and so on, all in their own orbit, all travelling around at their own rate of speed, progression, and that carries on for almost 26,000 years, and exactly at the fraction of a second they all come back in line.



I wonder how the dickens that Man times such a thing as that! What a timetable! Not a fraction of a second out. You know, I've often thought of that and similar things, as to people arguing there can't be a God because of this or that or the other. All around you whichever way you look, it couldn't possibly be if it wasn't for the incredible intelligence of God, which is nature, which is what you want to work with.

**E.G.:** *And there's some philosophy of that timing, you think, that we should . . . ?*

**F.R.:** A time and place for all things. Bring the order and harmony of the Universe into your life. You are a miniature Universe. Every human being is a miniature Universe. The atoms of your body – that is a miniature Universe, and you're expanding, your consciousness is expanding. Some day you will find you're a god in the making, and you're going to do some day like the Christ did and create another galaxy in the expanding Universe. That is why the Universe is expanding.

When you approach your organic gardening in that spirit, you're setting up conscious communication. I leave all that to the wife, I'm only this sort of thing ...  
(Fred Robinson, in *Earth Garden*, no.1, February 1972, p. 35).

Fred's last line speaks of his assessment of himself as a *conveyor of information* rather than as an adept or sensitive – '*it's not my rôle in this life*'. He saw Mary as the *sensitive* while he was 'this sort of thing' – a teacher and catalyst.

The text, besides exemplifying the kind of communicative acts that so typified his teaching, also verifies the historical data and order of events in his life during the time he was cutting ties with ROTA. There is however some historical data about this period that was locked away until relatively recently. It allows for another picture of Fred Robinson, from quite a different perspective than has yet been covered.

## **Fred Robinson's ASIO File**

In early March 1961 Mrs Lucy Pringle, Fred's *Oahspean*/Faithist student, had, in consultation with Fred and both the Vegetarian Society and the Flying Saucer Research Society of South Australia, booked two talks for him at the South Australian State Library for the 14<sup>th</sup> March and the 22<sup>nd</sup> March. The details of the first talk, the cancellation of the second, and the attitude of Fredrick Stone, the President of South Australia's Flying Saucer group, to both Fred Robinson's lectures and other issues have been preserved by way of a letter from the South Australia Police (Special Branch) to Queensland Police (Special 'D' Branch). This letter led directly to the creation of an Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation file on Fred Robinson, which

included biographical information about him and a photograph dated 1950.<sup>154</sup> The following section examines the file and the part played by Stone.

### **Fred Stone and ASIO**

The letter examined first was written on the 24<sup>th</sup> March 1961 and was headed ‘Letter from Officer in Charge: Special Branch. Subject: Australian Flying Saucer Research Society – Frederic Philip STONE, President. Fred ROBINSON – lecture by. Ref. No. 259/12). The introduction to this letter refers to a phone call made to the police on the 16<sup>th</sup> March (name blanked out) which introduces the subject matter of the five page 2,500 word letter. The writer refers to Stone’s visit to the Public Library to cancel the future 22<sup>nd</sup> March meeting: ‘He did not elaborate on his reasons for doing it, but it appeared that the gathering had considered Robinson a fanatic and a crank’ (SA Police letter 24<sup>th</sup> March 1961, p. 1). The number at the meeting is estimated at ‘about fifty to sixty’ and confirms that it had been ‘organised by Mrs. PRINGLE a member of the Vegetarian Society’ (ibid.).

The police officer reports ‘At about 4 pm on Tuesday, 21<sup>st</sup> March 1961 I interviewed Mr. Fredrick STONE, a lift operator at the Australia Hotel, North Adelaide, at his residence 22 Northcote Street, Kilburn’ (ibid.). The letter mentions that Stone was the President of the Flying Saucer Research Society and had been an active member since 1954. The interview places on record Stone’s achievements, credentials and the loyalties of the group he presided over:

The Society had about 100 members in this State with approximately fifty overseas subscribers. Each quarter about 350 copies of the magazine called ‘The Australian Saucer Record’ were printed on a duplicating machine at his home, and circulated to the above mentioned subscribers. Copies were also posted to Flying Saucer Societies in other countries who reciprocated ...

Stone stated that his magazine was sent to most countries in the world with the exception of the U.S.S.R. and added that one copy was sent to Prince PHILIP at Buckingham Palace, as a result of a request received some years ago from an official on behalf of the Prince ...

Mr. Stone stressed the fact that his Society was a non-political, non-religious organisation, which was primarily concerned with the collection of data dealing with the appearance and performance of ‘flying saucers’. This it received in letters from

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<sup>154</sup> While this photograph was mentioned in the online file, my attempts at retrieving it through the Freedom of Information provisions of the South Australian Police have proved fruitless.

numerous persons who alleged they had travelled in or seen such machines ... Some of these accounts were published in the Society's magazine, and if it were possible to discount them by logical argument that was done (ibid., pp.1–2).

Having painted his subject as politically, religiously and rationally *acceptable*, the writer continues:

In stressing the fact that his group was a non-political organisation STONE said that the Adelaide Society had ceased dealing with their Sydney counterpart because “of their Pink outlook”, and added that he had been in touch with the R.A.A.F. Security on several occasions (ibid., p. 2).

This confirms Stone's complaint to ASIO about the Communist sympathies of some of the Sydney Flying Saucer Society's membership – the subject of controversy within the UFO community; something that the Australian Ufologist and UFO historian Bill Chalker calls 'The Australian UFO History Wars' (2006). While this controversy has little to do with Fred Robinson, it was vital to Fredrick Stone, who was clearly at pains to convey the anti-Communist ethos of his UFO society and his own politically pure loyalties. In a letter dated 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1971, the Regional Director of ASIO in Adelaide makes clear that Stone had problems of his own during the early 1960s; for this reason Stone would have wanted to be seen as helpful to the Australian Security authorities.

STONE has been kept under notice since 1961 as a result of discussions, A.S.I.O. (HQ) – A.S.I.O. (SA). He was interviewed by one of our officers on the 14<sup>th</sup> June, 1963 when he admitted association with Scientology, but has not come to adverse notice since (F.E. Ellis, Regional Security Officer (S.A.)).

Perhaps Stone's report about Robinson had a dual purpose: finding vent for his own anger and frustration at Robinson's public position on UFOs; and making himself look good in the eyes of the security authorities. One can only wonder about the cost to the State and Commonwealth of such vexatious reporting. In a letter reviewing an interview with Stone on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1963, a remarkable assessment is made of a Xerox copy of a booklet entitled 'Scientology – the Problems of Work', which had come into the interviewer's possession:

After procuring this learned epistle, it is the humble opinion of the undersigned that the contents are 'psychological “baffle-gab” aimed at gullible introverts (declared by self-confessed indices) who are prepared to pay to effect their own self-cure.' (A.G. Halden, Establishment Security Officer, Security Branch Salisbury, 19<sup>th</sup> June 1963) (Department of Supply, file YA 913).

## Stone's Report on the Fred Robinson Lecture

The Special Branch Police Officer, K. Cotton, who interviewed Stone on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1961 records in his letter that Stone's UFO organisation and the Vegetarian Society had obtained a room at the Public Library for the purpose of hearing lectures by Fred Robinson on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of March. It had been organised by Mrs Lucy Pringle, then the Secretary of the Vegetarian Society.<sup>155</sup> Pringle is described as, 'a well educated woman of about 65 years, with whom STONE was not well acquainted' (ibid., p. 2). She is seen as having 'procured' Fred Robinson's services. The following text has been quoted in full as it so eloquently reveals the way Fred Robinson defied conventions of most kind:

The lecture on the 14<sup>th</sup> March was scheduled to commence at 8.00pm, and at 7.40 pm on that evening, Stone, in his capacity of chairman, arrived at the room to supervise proceedings. He found to his amazement that ROBINSON had already commenced to entertain those present with tape recorded speeches of his own [but not of himself], and had requested comments for discussion on matters referred to in the recordings. STONE added that some of these recordings were poorly prepared and extremely difficult to hear.

At 8 pm STONE approached ROBINSON and asked when the real lecture was going to commence. ROBINSON replied that it had commenced, and Stone then told him that he had been under the impression that the lecture would be delivered verbally and not by recordings. Also, as quite a few had arrived at specified time of 8 pm they had missed part of the lecture and would not be satisfied with proceedings, as they had paid to attend. STONE then discussed the matter with members of his committee at the rear of the room, whilst ROBINSON continued his lecture, and it was unanimously decided that the Flying Saucer Society would take no further official interest in the business, and cancel arrangements previously made for the use of the room on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March.

STONE stated that the talk given by ROBINSON concerned the subjects of vegetarian diet and the Naturist beliefs of living, but added that he was so annoyed by the way things had turned out, he had paid little attention to what was being said.

Fred Robinson was ready to start a lecture once some people arrived, and would think nothing of playing a tape to utilise *the precious time* while waiting for more people to come. In this way his talks were in danger of having no beginning and no ending. Mary

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<sup>155</sup> A mini dossier on each of the players in this letter provides the following kinds of details. I have included here the quoted details of Mrs Lucy Pringle from the different sources employed:

**Electoral Office:** Lucy Caroline PRINGLE, pensioner, of 83 Archer Street North Adelaide. Born 12.12.1895 in England. Card dated 3.6.1959; **Witness:** G.A. DOWNING, Doctor of Psychology, 85 Archer Street, Nth. Adelaide [neighbour]; **Comment:** Mrs. L.C. PRINGLE is recorded as residing at 51 Austral Terrace, Malvern in the Directory; **Postal Investigation Department:** Inquiries at this Branch reveal that Box 1879P was first rented in 1954 in the name of L. C. PRINGLE, Central Registrar's Office Adelaide University...'; **Special Branch:** no previous record. (ibid., p. 5).

attempted to train him in meeting procedure, so Fred would just sit straight in his chair, smiling benignly as his audience arrived; something that his 1970s attendees found just as meaningful as the lecture, for he did have an arrestingly peaceful countenance. When asked to finish by way of a wind-up signal he finished so abruptly I was hesitant to use it, for the atmosphere was often electric, and such a sign seemed to ‘cut the flow of spirit’. Fred hated to think he might be rambling on. As Fred saw it he was not giving the lecture to ‘lecture people’ – he was there to ‘*catalyse those who were ready*’. If listeners were engaged and seemed like they wanted to hear more he would go on until someone asked him to stop.

This Special Branch letter details that Robinson had visited Stone’s home ‘on two occasions during the present stay’, suggesting that they already knew each other. Stone supplied the following personal information about Robinson:

STONE described Fred ROBINSON as being about 76 years of age, of a tall thin build, and a pensioner. He had travelled from Cairns to Brisbane on a free rail pass, which led him to believe that ROBINSON may have been a former member of the Queensland Railways. He arrived in Adelaide on the 6<sup>th</sup> March and was scheduled to leave again on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March for Queensland, stopping in Victoria on the way to contact people in that State. Whilst in Adelaide he was staying at the Classic Hotel, 220 Hutt Street (ibid., pp. 2–3).

It seems that Fred’s travelling to ‘contact people’ for something more than business or social reasons, was a suspicious enough reason for investigation. Stone clearly had the attention of the interviewing officer – particularly since some of the beliefs of Robinsons were being divulged:

ROBINSON’S beliefs followed the line taken by the “Urantia Brotherhood” of 553 Diversey Street [sic], Parkway, Chicago 14 Illinois, U.S.A., a religious organisation that uses the “Book of Urantia” as its bible, and which propounds a return to nature to solve the problems of this age. This group is believed to have followers in Queensland (ibid., p. 3).

The details of the ‘Urantia Brotherhood’ suggest that Fred was in the 1960s speaking more about *Urantia* than *Oahspe* – certainly this was so regarding his religious belief system. The following adds weight to a connection longer than this one visit between Robinson and the UFO groups/publications to which Stone was connected.

Some years ago the “Urantia Brotherhood” requested that the magazine “The Australian Saucer Record” be sent to them, but as they did not reciprocate by returning their own literature, no further correspondence was carried out.

STONE stated that ROBINSON believed that the space-men who man the “flying saucers”: could be the “Angelic Beings” referred to in the “Book of Urantia” (ibid., p. 3).

The above indicates that the Urantia Foundation, the body responsible for the functioning of the “Urantia Brotherhood” (and all groups connected with the dissemination of the Urantia Book and its teachings) had decided that UFO Societies were not groups to which they should be connected. Even Fred Robinson, Australia’s most active importer of *The Urantia Book*, would have been seen as being unrepresentative of *The Urantia Book’s* teachings. Fred’s ‘*Space People*’ statements were not the kind of publicity the Urantia Foundation was looking for. By carrying an *Oahspe Bible* with a *Urantia Book* in his little wooden attaché case, Fred became suspect to those closely associated with either. Fred’s eclecticism was to remain a major drawback for him and his message until the 1970s, when *baby-boomer-synthesis* was the order of the day. The probability that Fred and his audiences conflated the positions of *Oahspe* and *Urantia* with yet other teachings is high – providing Stone, and ASIO further grounds for concern.

Besides his interest in the teachings of the “Brotherhood” ROBINSON also upholds the “Douglas Credit System”, but his primary concern is the establishment of a community in Queensland, which will be self-supporting, living off the produce grown, and governed by Naturist teachings. At the present time he has leased from the Government of Queensland an area of land situated about five miles from Cairns, where he has commenced this plan, but eventually he hopes to establish a larger community in another area about twenty miles from Cairns. When this has been done, the first place will be used as a clearing house for the larger colony.

ROBINSON told STONE that he had already a number of interested people in Melbourne, who are prepared to cooperate in his scheme, and that a Mrs. JARDINE of the Victorian Education Department had agreed to go to the colony as an educational supervisor. Stone pointed out that this idea had been previously tried on a number of occasions always to end in failure due to individual jealousies, and named a group of American people who called themselves the “Brotherhood of the Seven Rays”, who had attempted a similar colony in Peru with disastrous results.<sup>156</sup> ROBINSON replied that he understood the difficulties involved, but was prepared to concentrate on the children rather than adults, and stated that he intended obtaining orphan children for his colony.

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<sup>156</sup> This is the group which Festinger *et al.* (1956) studied in his work on cognitive dissonance, and the same group out of which was to come Williamson’s (a.k.a. Brother Philip’s) *Secret of the Andes* (1961).



STONE, who was previously a Salvation Army officer, told ROBINSON that he would never be able obtain permission of the authorities in the matter.

He summed it up by stating that whilst he believed ROBINSON's ideas were prompted by the best of motives, they were completely impractical (ibid., p. 3).

Stone, concerned that his own magazine might be targeted by ASIO, goes on to mention a controversial article he was about to publish from an American correspondent (whose name Stone refused to divulge) who

... claimed that Hitler was still alive after escaping from Germany to Patagonia, and then to Antarctica. This man claimed that he had travelled in a "flying saucer" to Queen Maud Land,<sup>157</sup> entering the area from Vahsel Bay through a tunnel under the Filchner Ice Shelf,<sup>158</sup> where he saw a community of Germans established. The "flying saucer" in which he travelled was powered by "electro-magnetism," a means of propulsion previously experimented with by the Germans (ibid., p. 3).

In the Australia of the late 1950s and early 1960s where 'Reds' were feared, and 'Pink' organisations suspected to be influencing the leaders of Flying Saucer Societies, Stone is seen as assisting the 'Special Branch':

STONE said he would have paid little attention to this [story] except for the fact that he had recently read in a local paper that the Soviet was interested in Queen Maud Land, and he certainly did not wish to publish anything of value to them. The article is to be printed at the end of this month in the quarterly issues of the "Saucer Record", under the title of "An Amazing story", and a further article refuting it by logical argument will be published in the next issue (Copies of the magazine will be forwarded to this office) (ibid., p. 4).

The bulk of the rest of this letter deals with Stone's letters to the RAAF Service Police, and Stone's family's details from the Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths. The interviewer reports on Mrs Stone's position on UFOs.

Mrs. STONE stated that she was not very interested in "flying saucers", although she was a good listener. She considered herself too unintelligent to understand the subject, and said it was all over her head (ibid.).

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<sup>157</sup> Queen Maud Land is a 2.5 million-square-kilometre sector of Antarctica claimed as a dependent territory by Norway ... From 1939 until 1945, Germany held a claim for New Swabia, which consisted of part of Queen Maud Land. On 23 June 1961, Queen Maud Land became part of the Antarctic Treaty System, making it a demilitarized zone ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen\\_Maud\\_Land](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen_Maud_Land), accessed 26.6.2011).

<sup>158</sup> The Filchner Ice Shelf is the eastern part of the Filchner-Ronne ice shelf. It is bounded on the west by Berkner Island and on the east by Coats Land. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Filchner-Ronne\\_Ice\\_Shelf](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Filchner-Ronne_Ice_Shelf), accessed 26.6.2011).

The Special Branch concluded that ‘none of the persons mentioned in this report have previously been recorded’ (ibid., p. 5). However it also said ‘(I)nquiries will be made through the Queensland Special Branch to ascertain whether ROBINSON has previously come under the notice of the authorities in that State, and if so, to obtain particulars regarding his past history (ibid.). The letter concludes with a suggestion that gives it further life:

Perhaps this report might now be forwarded to the Regional Director, ‘D’ Branch,<sup>159</sup> Adelaide for his information, and to supplement previous particulars transmitted to Mr. XXXX of that department on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1961 by telephone (K. Cotton letter, Special Branch, 24.3.1961).

Why is this relevant to this story and NRMs? It reveals how what is happening in society even – or perhaps especially – at the most secret level of surveillance, effects the functioning of those leaders/founders of movements who espouse unorthodox beliefs and strange activities.

### **ASIO’s History of Fred Robinson**

The Queensland Special Branch soon returned a letter detailing Fred’s already suspect history. Some of the information confirms the research, while some provides supplementary details. By quoting this letter, the way in which the authorities of the time investigated marginal and eccentric people like Fred Robinson, can be explored.

**COPY:** [undated]

Sir,

Fred ROBINSON, appears to be identical with a person of the same name, born in England on the 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 1891, and at present residing at Bunda Street, Cairns.

Fred ROBINSON, also known as “Brother Fred of the Rosicrucians” is recorded at this Branch as being the auditor for a Company, registered as the “Rosicrucian Aquaria Mecca Pty. Ltd.” during the years 1940–1951, and also the auditor of a Company registered as the “Austral Aquaria Pty. Ltd.” during the years 1949–1951. Both these companies are currently registered in Brisbane and have William Henry LONG and Richard Norman ROBINSON as their Directors. He has also been a member of firms registered as the “The Queensland Gymnosophical Community”, the “Aquarian Health Foods of the Rosicrucian Order of the Aquarians” and “the Aquarian College of Sciences”. The registration of these firms has now lapsed.

Fred did have Cairns as his home base in 1961; he was part of the ROTA conglomerate of companies; Long (who was still alive) was no longer active; and Fred was using the

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<sup>159</sup> ‘D Branch’ is code for ‘directly connected to ASIO’.

term Austral Aquaria during the late 1940s and through the 1950s. The following details the activities of ROTA and his family split-up:

ROBINSON became interested in the Rosicrucian Order in 1937 and was ordained a Priest of that Order on the 25<sup>th</sup> April, 1943. He resided at the headquarters of the Order at "The Retreat", Rota, Browns Plains, via Beenleigh and worked on the property which occupied an area of approximately 800 acres. He was a vegetarian and when confined to the establishment he did not wear clothing. It is known that he was a married man but he severed connections with his family, with the exception of his son, Richard Norman ROBINSON, because of their refusal to participate in his religion.

He was present at the Browns Plains address when the leader of the Order, William Henry LONG, was arrested in 1953 on charges of procuring a male person to commit an act of gross indecency and indecently dealing with a boy under the age of 14 years, for which he was sentenced to imprisonment for five years. It is also recorded that Sidney Boyd MESSENGER, who came to the notice of South Australian Police in 1941 in relation to a charge of sending an indecent photograph through the post, had communication with the Rosicrucians at Browns Plains while Robinson was there.

The above adds detail to the research already gathered, and fills in some gaps in the story, lost in the fire that destroyed Long's Police Files in the 1960s. The story increases the likelihood that Fred's other son was accosted by Long, and that Fred was trying to hold the movement together for Ione, during a period when Parcaë Long was involved in illegal activities. Having dealt with the unsavoury details of Fred's associates, the letter now turns to Fred's then current activities:

Inquiries at the State Children's Department, Brisbane, showed that on the 30<sup>th</sup> March, 1960, ROBINSON called at that Department and stated that he was a member of a religious sect which was desirous of establishing a home for orphan children in either the Cairns or Mossman areas of Queensland. He was informed that the Department would not allow the outright adoption of the children by the religious body. He has not made any further representations to the State's Children's Department since.

This drive towards a Fraternity/Community was always on the boil. Fred's time in Adelaide, as it was in Melbourne and elsewhere, was absorbed in getting an *Oahspean* styled Community functioning in Australia (as well as continuing his dissemination of Revealed Knowledge by importing cases of *The Urantia Book* (1955) at cost, and recommending the *Oahspe: A Kosmon Bible* (which in 1960 was published by Kosmon Press, London, in a compact edition). Social conditions had however changed since the late nineteenth century when Newbrough advertised for 'waifs' which were left on his doorstep: 'no questions asked'. Fred's eccentricity seems to have been an asset regarding his security risk:

Recent inquiries have been made in Cairns, concerning ROBINSON and it has been reported that he is regarded as being extremely eccentric but is considered as absolutely harmless. His main interest appears to be in space objects and he reads a great amount of literature on this subject, particularly in relation to flying saucers. He is also known to take an interest in the sect known as the “Urantia Brotherhood” but there is no known organisation of the sect within the Cairns area and little is known of their activities.

The last page of this letter details the whereabouts of the property which was first leased and would later act as a ‘clearing house’ (as Stone described it his interview) for the other lease on the slopes of Mount Misery. Neither Community survived the early pioneering stage.

ROBINSON is known to have stated that he had leased an area of land in the vicinity of Lake Placid, approximately seven miles from Cairns, and that he intends to use the land for the purpose of naturist teachings, however, to date there has been no activity by any persons in that area. He has been interested in the Douglas Credit System for some years but as previously reported his main interest at the present time appears to be space objects. Copy of photograph of ROBINSON, taken in 1950, attached (ASIO File 2155, headed ‘Flying Saucer Research Bureau (Qld) Volume 1, dated 3.2.1979).<sup>160</sup>

## A Voice in Fred’s Head

Fred, like other believers in the New Age born before World War I or between the Wars, was enamoured of *Inner Guidance*. The most prestigious and remarkable type of inner guidance was the ‘*Voice inside your head*’ – ideally one’s own head; but if, for whatever reason this *guiding voice* was not accessible, then *the voice* inside another person’s head might do. An *adept’s* head, a *sensitive’s* head, a *reliable medium’s* head, one’s personal *spiritual teacher’s* head, or (and perhaps most conveniently) one’s *soul mate’s* head could all provide this *spiritual guidance* in the absence of one’s own *inner voice*.

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<sup>160</sup> This letter – without the name of the writer, date, or the origin of the office from which it came – can be viewed in the ASIO File cited. However, although the file is on-line it is difficult to find without precise navigation details. Australian Flying Saucer Historian Bill Chalker knew of this file’s existence and included the following details and directions for finding this ‘National Archives of Australia File series A6122, control symbol 2155 titled “Flying Saucer Research Bureau (Qld) Vol. 1”’: Go to <http://www.naa.gov.au> ... Click on ‘**Record Search**’ top right hand corner of the screen (or the green side-menu bar) ... Click on ‘**Search now – as a guest**’ ... Click on the tab ‘**Record Search – Advanced Search**’ ... Click on bottom box ‘**Items**’ ... In the box ‘**Item Control Symbol**’ type in 2155 ...click search ... Go through the list (to the second page of entries) until you find the file A6122, ‘The Flying Saucer Research Bureau (QLD) Vol. 1 ... Click on the file and then open up the ‘**Digital Version**’ (<http://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/scripts/Imagine.asp?B=8194228>, accessed 9.7.2011). It seems that ‘Freedom of Information’ does not currently mean ‘Access to Information’. A Google search for ‘Fred Robinson with S.A. Police, ASIO or Flying Saucers’ does not lead to this site.

This pattern can be detected in Fred's life, as it is in the life of another and more well known New Age pioneer, Peter Caddy, who, while born twenty six years later than Fred (in 1917) had aligned himself with a series of *sensitives* who heard the voice of God in a mystical way – *voices* which he was to follow. His wife, Eileen, a co-founder of Findhorn Community, believed that God spoke to her.<sup>161</sup> Fred's later partner Mary Broun was to have an analogous experience, believing God was speaking *to* or *through* her via her dreams and visions.

Fred's reliance on, and association with those who had an 'inner voice' experience can be noted in the above interview: 'There was a medium advising Fred what to do. She had the key to the bank safety deposit box. And her and the two university people cleared it out' (Harm, 10.3.2010). The veracity of 'inner voices' clearly cannot be easily assessed. Fred employed the Biblical verse '*by their fruits ye shall know them*' as being the way to test an 'inner voice'.<sup>162</sup> But this test never altogether 'proves' specific 'guidance'. It can always be claimed for instance that the gestation period of any 'guidance' is longer than we expect – conceivably generations. Fred had another Biblical verse for just such an occasion: '*A thousand years is but as a day to the Lord*'.<sup>163</sup> Fred occasionally had a voice in his own head. He told the story many times of the moment he decided to go to Perth. He had apparently almost gone there many times – *but had been stopped*. But this time he could not be stopped:

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<sup>161</sup> Eileen Caddy's seminal New Age book of received guidance *God Spoke to Me* was published by Findhorn from 1966 onwards ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eileen\\_Caddy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eileen_Caddy), accessed, 18.6.2010).

<sup>162</sup> 'Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?' (Mathew 7:16, KJV).

<sup>163</sup> 'But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day' (2 Peter 3:8 KJV). This verse was also useful for Fred's 'prophetic' prognostications (which were really other people's dates that Fred had coopted – again someone else's 'voice'). After a prophesied date had come and gone, Fred would simply explain that the date was somewhat 'out of timing', segueing into his version of the above verse without missing a beat.

*I was in Melbourne walking past Flinders Street Station when I heard a loud voice in my head – as clear as I am speaking to you now – it said just one thing: “When are you going to go to Perth?” I simply changed direction and went straight to the counter where I asked for a one way ticket to Perth for the next morning. I was told they were sold out and had been for some time on account of the Commonwealth Games; and that it was unlikely any tickets would be available for a couple of weeks. As I was remonstrating with this ticket officer a cancellation came through on the telephone, and I got that ticket to Perth the next morning. (Fred Robinson, lectures, 1970s).<sup>164</sup>*

Perhaps this story was an inspiration to the budding *intuitional-space-cadets* of the New Age baby-boomer generation – it certainly was for me. The *direct-voice-inside-your-head* experience became interlinked with the ideal of ‘*constant contact*’ – a term Fred used to indicate an awareness of *God’s guidance* at all times and in all situations. In this state one was following one’s God given intuition and was ‘*in the flow*’.<sup>165</sup> Anything that happened could be seen as being ‘*meant to be*’ – one of the most well known New Age phrases. Fred regarded this *direct voice experience* as the turning point that guided him to Mary Broun (25.6.1913 – 2.2.1989), the person most responsible for the future shaping of the Universal Brotherhood Community as ‘*a prototype model of an Alternative Society*’ or ‘*a Modern Monastery*’ (as she variously described it).

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<sup>164</sup> The British Empire and Commonwealth games were held in Perth, Western Australia from November 22<sup>nd</sup> to December 1<sup>st</sup> 1962 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1962\\_British\\_Empire\\_and\\_Commonwealth\\_Games](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1962_British_Empire_and_Commonwealth_Games), accessed 18.6.2010).

<sup>165</sup> This New Age term ‘*in the flow*’ was not to my knowledge influenced by the study of the concept of ‘flow’ researched by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in the 1960s, and later used in the theories of Maslow and Rogers in their development of the humanistic tradition of psychology. However there is synergy with the idea of ‘being in God’s flow’ as the Robinsons, Caddys and other New Agers have used the term. Csikszentmihalyi’s research of ‘flow’ observed that artists who would essentially get lost in their work – so immersed they would disregard their need for food, water and even sleep ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flow\\_\(psychology\)#History.2Fbackground](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flow_(psychology)#History.2Fbackground), accessed 12.6.2011). Certainly Fred Robinson and many participants in NRMs before and since, have felt themselves in a ‘creative flow’, where food and sleep are neglected (something anti-cultists describe as ‘sleep deprivation’). However there is something more to ‘the flow’ as interpreted by some modern New Agers: ‘ultimate rightness’ is implied in the use of this term. In this kind of flow, healthy nutritious food and an appropriate amount of rejuvenating sleep is integral to ‘living in the flow’ – a state where one is ‘attuned to a friendly universe’, where anything that happens is considered as part of ‘God’s Plan’. Such an idea has resonance with, and was likely derived from the Biblical verse: ‘And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose’ (Romans 8: 28, KJV). In the UBI we paraphrased this such: ‘All things work together for good for those who love God and hear what he has to say.’ The secularisation of the idea sees ‘the zone’ a space in which ‘the flow’ is experienced.

It was Mary Broun who became the most influential of Fred's vehicles for spiritual guidance – and his most stabilising influence. The following chapter explores Mary's evolution as a 'seeker' and adherent of social, religious and New Age movements, while it also explains something of her subsequent influence on Fred, and the members of the Universal Brotherhood Community.





## Chapter 6: Life of Mary Broun Until Meeting Fred Robinson.

Drawing heavily on two of Mary Robinson's autobiographical accounts in the first part of this chapter, I sketch the story of Mary Broun until she met Fred Robinson, and before 1963, when they together formed *Shalam*, the five acre farm in the foothills of Perth, Western Australia. In the second part, I will explore some of the ideas, along with their corresponding group influences, which Mary experienced in politics, religion, life-style movements, and ultimately as a New Age seeker, or a *spiritual butterfly*<sup>166</sup> – the metaphor which a detractor had once used to describe her, and which she later happily adopted as a trope to depict her own search for truth: 'I was a spiritual butterfly. I gathered understandings from many spiritual groups and pollinated those I came in contact with along the way' (Mary Robinson, pers. comm., 1970s).

It was this eclectic and exploratory *I-will-experience-it* streak in Mary, made possible by a gradually growing self-confidence and *God Consciousness*, which later combined with Fred's predilection for change and his recognition of himself as a self-contained *New Age Information Centre*. Together these features created the foundation on which the Universal Brotherhood was built.

Mary was clearly not going to become part of any one group. She was not an easily led 'religious-follower', partly because in her own words she was a *contrary Mary* – a fiercely independent thinker. Ultimately the only group she could harmonise with was one that she started herself, in which she would be the nucleus. Was Mary perhaps 'destined' to start her own religious organisation? This chapter addresses this question, among others.

Here I access an eclectic range of data, including Mary's first and third person autobiographical writings; her dream diaries; memoirs from others; along with my own reflections on her. All allow me as narrator, biographer, one-time confidante, and

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<sup>166</sup> As in the Fred Robinson Biography I have employed this *Freestyle Script* to indicate Mary's voice when using terms she habitually used.

Community participant, to show and mirror through my writing how Mary positioned herself (even if unconsciously) as a mystic/visionary and *Missionary for the New Age*.

Mary contributed as significantly as Fred to the development and the recognition of Shalam as the preeminent unaligned New Age Information Centre in Australia during the 1960s, while also being the unquestioned guiding influence of the Robinsons' *living communal artefact*: the public (exoteric) and the cloistered (esoteric) performances of the Universal Brotherhood from 1972–1987. The Universal Brotherhood Inc. thus became a strange blend of eclecticism and *exclusivism*; anachronism and futurism; spirituality and practicality.

Mary depicted herself as *a simple country housewife who followed God's guidance one step at a time*.

Disgruntled ex-members depicted her as a controlling power-tripper. The existing research paints Mary Robinson as a person enamoured of her own ability as the group's disciplinarian and 'Discerner' (Black 1983). While there is an argument to be made for all of these positions, my research has led me to a much fuller-flavoured, colourful personality than she may have appeared to those who had run-ins with her – including me.

Mary believed that 'what you invoke you are responsible for' (a line used by Peter and Eileen Caddy of Findhorn), and so she was forever trying to protect the group she and Fred had produced from '*the negative forces*' which she felt were attacking the relatively few 'Light Centres' on the planet. Fred was in her experience too easily led, and not much practical help. Life in the Community was thus too often placed on a war footing via Mary's exhaustingly continuous guidance and dreams. The forces of darkness were almost constantly pitched against the forces of light in a battle for the souls of the Community members. The Devil – *Old Nick* – was, as she saw him, always trying to subtly trap us into breaking *God's Laws of Life*. In Mary's eyes *Divine Destiny* had placed her in a position of benevolently guiding the Community, and she was prepared to juggle the power at her disposal (often using others like myself and other CentreCore members), to lead the group through the dark storms of change into the light of an always-imminent New Age.

This research suggests that not only was Mary Broun-Robinson (née O'Dwyer) the major influence in the popularisation of Fred Robinson in the 1960s and '70s, but that she was equally involved in a practical blending of *up-in-the-clouds New Age Aquarian Spirituality*, and *down-to-earth ageless organic sustainability* in Australia during this period. The social and political work Mary Broun did prior to meeting Fred Robinson is worthy of research in its own right. I have had to limit the scope of my research on Mary's early life as it remains tangential to the story of the forming of the ideas that set the Universal Brotherhood in motion. Her later work however positions her as one of the most significant Australian mystics of the Twentieth Century. Her farsightedness, combined with her politically active and religiously reflective thinking, is a subject that could be taken up by scholars in the future, for some of her 'writings' in her 'dream books' are held by her son, Noel, and will one day be added to the archives of the Universal Brotherhood.<sup>167</sup> In a sense I am relieved not to have access to this resource. It is too close emotionally – as my own reminiscences of her during the Universal Brotherhood Community days of the 1970s and '80s help reveal.

### **The Little Aussie Mystic**

Mary was a little Aussie Mystic with a particular facility for receiving spiritual experiences. One day in the early 1980s while returning from Bunbury in her green Kombi, she became convinced that she (and by extension the driver, a *CentreCore* member)<sup>168</sup> had experienced a time-warp, arriving back in Balingup in twenty minutes – a physical impossibility for the one hour or so drive.

I was not convinced that this experience was real, feeling there was probably another explanation for it. However she 'knew' it was true and I couldn't prove it wasn't. I told her frankly that I didn't believe the story, and therefore could not be enthusiastic about it. She was out to prove that it did happen and so I was not very popular for questioning

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<sup>167</sup> I have made the suggestion to Noel Broun that he donate his mother's papers to the State Library of Western Australia's Batty Library, designating a release date for any 'dream books' and any other private papers he may have. Noel, in his mid-seventies at the time of writing, holds these papers with a sense of sacred trust, unready to part with them lest they be used in a manner that he feels his mother would not appreciate. He will have a copy of this thesis, and is aware of the value of the archive.

<sup>168</sup> Each of the unusual management terms: *Nucleus*, *CentreCore*, *InCore*, *AnCore*, *OnCore*, and *Seekers*, has been explained in the Glossary (pp. iv–vi).

her experience. Mary felt that such experiences were simply a part of ‘the speeding up of vibrations’, and she was genuinely concerned that my worldly scepticism would cut me off from being used as an open-minded instrument during the miraculous times in which we lived – the transformative and extra-dimensional birth of a New Age.

## **Part 1: Autobiographical and Biographical Accounts**

Through Mary’s son Noel Broun, I sighted, copied, and have been given permission to use an unusual autobiographical third person account, which Mary had handwritten on both sides of a thin gauge A5 writing pad.<sup>169</sup> This thirteen page record of her life extends until a year or so after meeting Fred Robinson and reveals the struggles she had in coming to terms with her own perceptions of her destiny. Probably written in 1988, the year before she died, it was perhaps meant to be the start of a longer biography.<sup>170</sup> I draw substantially from the text, using it to structure this chapter. I employ italics to indicate when she has been quoted using this text. Where a particular story or period of her life is being told I indent this italicised account and retain the 12 point font size of my own narrated commentary (but in single spacing). I gauge it important that readers experience Mary’s own, albeit third person, voice. This is likely to be exactly what she intended be done one day, so I will let her have her own objective-subjective say.

I have also drawn on a typed, two page, in-house Universal Brotherhood published article, titled ‘Divine Destinies: The Plan that Failed but Still Won Out’, written the year before Fred Robinson’s death in April 1983. This text, written by Mary in the first person, focuses on the spiritual contributions of the Broun family. It is a curious and revealing personal document, one which I suspect most ex-members of the Universal Brotherhood may find difficult to make sense of. I indent this text and indicate its use with the bracketed reference (*Divine Destinies*, 1982).

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<sup>169</sup> Almost all the texts written or printed by the Robinsons are designed to save paper – certainly all those that Fred had anything to do with. This meant filling up almost every space on both sides, often at the expense of easy readability.

<sup>170</sup> As I did not know of this biographical sketch prior to my falling out with Mary and then leaving the Community in 1987, I have deduced that it must have been written after – with early 1988 being the most probable time of writing.

This biographical sketch is further supplemented with notes supplied by Mary's eldest son Noel Broun and her youngest Graham Broun, and some close friends during this period of her life. My own comments contextualise the biography within the later formation of the Universal Brotherhood, its lifestyle and its own schema. This frail little Amazon-cum-country house-wife was to have a big influence on many a 'hippie'. She turned me from an organic, spaced-out, nudist New Ager, into the Vice-Principal, 'Preacher' (Black 1983) and trouble-shooter of the Universal Brotherhood Incorporated – in less than eighteen months.

### **A delicate child becomes a champion**

Mary's father, John Edward 'Frank' O'Dwyer, was from Catholic Irish convict descent, while her mother Elizabeth Ann was from a Church of England and 'more proper' English background. Frank worked in an administrative capacity in the Swan Brewery, 'even though he was a non-drinker' (Noel Broun, telephone conversation, 6.6.2008). At this point I will let Mary take up her own life story in the third person she herself employed.

*Mary was born on the 25<sup>th</sup> June 1912 in West Perth.<sup>171</sup> A very delicate baby, the Doctor advised her parents to take her out to where the tall trees grew if they wanted to rear her. That is why her family decided to help pioneer Carlisle, on the other side of the waterway that runs through Perth. Seven years it took to overcome her limitations and then she quickly became a champion sprinter.*

The experience Mary had of training as a sprinter, and the success it brought her as a champion, did, I suspect, have a major positive impact on building her self-confidence. She developed a taste for both 'training' and 'winning' during her athletic career. She also must have learnt something about 'coaching'. Noel still has some of her trophies.

*The highlight of that career was to win the first State-wide Ladies Hundred Yards Championship at the opening of Gloucester in 1930 [Gloucester Park is now mainly known for horse racing]. Shortly after that event Mary met with an unfortunate happening that was to change the course of her life.*

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<sup>171</sup> Noel Broun assures me her birth date was 25-6-1913. If this is so it is certainly odd that Mary added a year to her life – especially since 13 was *Contrary Mary's* lucky number.

Mary occasionally referred to the following story during her more *personal sharings* within the community and on the public platform, particularly as it related to a fear of the dark that dogged her well into her adult life.

*Having attended a play with a group of Y.M.C.A. friends one evening she missed the last bus and had to walk to catch the train which meant she had to walk quarter of a mile along a narrow path through the bush. On arriving at Carlisle station she was told there was a criminal rapist at large. There were no telephones to warn her parents so Mary decided to take the chance and hope for the best.*

*When she reached 150 yards from her home she saw a man coming towards her. It was full moon and a summer's night. Too late to turn back, so, hoping that he was only a late traveller like herself she carried on. But as she came within a few feet she knew she was wrong and fainted.*

*The man carried her towards her home for 50 yards and laid her down near a clump of bushes. Fortunately Mary awakened refreshed and realising what was about to happen she gave out a mighty kick and ran the last 100 yards home in record time.*

*However, the nervous effect was not so easily overcome, and after many months of the jitters she decided on a change of environment. She left her machinist job in the city and took a job as a housemaid at a small boarding house in Coorow.*

Noel Broun in his biographical sketch records that Mary became a domestic helper to the Bothe family in Coorow. Here she learnt many tricks about living in basic conditions. Some of those were taught to me and the other city-slicker-back-to-the-land-(ex)'hippies' of the 1970s. Coorow had for us become synonymous with swarming flies and sauna-like heat; however, without resorting to sprays or air conditioning we learnt from Mary how to shoo flies from a room with tea-towels, and how to keep cool during heatwaves by means of wet sheets.

## **Life in Coorow for Mary Broun**

The move to Coorow was always seen by Mary as part of her destiny. It was here that she married and began to raise her family. It was also here, in 1972, 280 kilometres North North-East of Perth on the Midlands Highway that her son Noel, a wheat-and-sheep farmer, lent his mother one of his farms, Carranya, on which to experiment with a fledgling community of *seekers* who had aligned themselves with his mother and her

charismatic second husband Fred Robinson. Today the Coorow area is well known for its wild-flowers, but in 1972 it was becoming known for its 'wild' *flower-children*.

The five acre paddock which Noel Broun leased to us for a peppercorn rental of one dollar a year included his first marital home. 'Carranya' – an Aboriginal word interpreted as 'sand hills turned to parklands' – was a few kilometres south of Coorow, a town that became the unlikely host of Australia's first Intentional, Alternative New Age Back-to-the-land Aquarian Community; a year before the name Nimbin became (in)famous for its 'drug-communes'.

The *Coorovian* culture of the early 1970s involved a strange adventure in diplomatic relations with 'straightness' for the recently reformed 'hippies' of the Community. However, for Mary Broun the venture involved a reconnection with Coorow and its people; and the place where she developed her most important relationship:

*It was here that Mary found God. Mary's father was a good conscientious man but due to unfortunate happenings within the church in his early life he declared he would not have his children taught religion until they were old enough to think for themselves, though their mother did teach them the Lord's Prayer. Therefore, as Mary had nothing much to do on Sunday morning she decided to go to church.*

Some of the women who went to church with Mary in Coorow revealed forty years later, that while she was highly regarded, she had also become an enigmatic and controversial figure. Mary was the talk of the town when in 1972 she returned with the white-haired *purple-ponchoed* Fred Robinson on her arm, especially as her ex-husband Clem and his second wife still lived in the town. It was hard for locals to know what to think when 'the commune' hit Coorow. Orgies were imagined by those who didn't know Mary. Those who did know her assured others that Mary was not the type.

Mary did however see life as a game, almost a sport. She liked to experiment. She put ideas and concepts through her own experiential tests and trials, and Church and God were no exception. It didn't take long before God became her most trusted and treasured friend and confidante. It is interesting to see how Mary related to local church goers, and how her intensely personal, mystic but pragmatic relationship with God first developed – as explained in her own detached reflective/reflexive voice:

*Her reaction was that as these people seemed to believe that God would help them if they asked for help, maybe He would help her out of some of the difficulties she was constantly getting into, doing a job she was not trained for.*

*So, in all sincerity, Mary started communicating with God, and soon found that He was ever ready to respond.*

No one ever questioned Mary's sincerity and dedication to what she earnestly believed to be 'the will of the God', with whose help she had developed a set of ethical and moral rules to live by. Although the 'difficulties' that the twenty year old Mary was having were not detailed, if some of them were relationship troubles, then God was soon to provide a solution:

*After a few short months Mary was sitting with the barber's wife watching the men play billiards when a young man walked in that she had not seen before. At first sight she knew that he was the man she was going to marry. She also saw difficulties that she was prepared to attempt to overcome.*

Mary's autobiographical text, 'Divine Destinies: The Plan that Failed but Still Won Out' (1982), takes up this story of courting in more detail, and this time in the first-person:

When I was twenty and a bit, working at Bothe's Boarding House ... I met Clem Broun and later married him.

It was one evening at the local sports room. I was sitting with the proprietor's wife when a young man walked in and stood watching the games. I looked, and I looked, and finally said to Grace, "Who is that man?" "That's Clem Broun," she said. And to myself I said, "That's my man."

A week or two later, we officially met at a local picnic. I admired some large white flowers, a hundred yards or more away. Native pear, I think they were. My gallant knight offered to take me to see them.

The walk grew around a bit, and at one stage I felt an overwhelming desire to 'walk beside this man all the days of my life'. Just at that moment we came to a creek, too wide to step across, so off came his shoes and socks and he carried me across. That was the beginning of our romance. We were married in a little over six months, on the 17<sup>th</sup> June 1933 (Mary Robinson, *Divine Destinie*, 1982).

Mary's eldest son, Noel Broun, fills in some of the details of his parent's early married life.



When she was twenty Mum met my father Clement McBride Broun, who was about six years older, and before long they were married. They lived in a little humpy under very primitive conditions on his farming property. About 1942 they purchased the adjoining farm and moved into a comfortable cement brick home and lived there for about six years. In 1948 Mary left the farm and we purchased a vacant block in Carlisle not far from her father. The family followed to the city leaving a manager on the farm.

Dad soon put together a comfortable home on the block and we kids went to school in Perth. Shortly after this my mother started working in Perth as a seamstress. On the social side Mum and Dad joined the Patch Theatre for a while and took part in plays. After that they decided that square dancing was a most attractive recreation, so during the 1950s we all became members of the W.A. Square Dance Club (Noel Broun, 6.6.2008).

## **Married Life: Communication problems**

I suspect that Mary always felt a bit sad and perhaps partially guilty that the marriage didn't work out, and not just 'for the sake of the children' either. Mary believed that her family had a 'divine destiny' to fulfil, and that because the marriage failed so did this 'first plan' of God. The story of the disconnection between Clem's and Mary's spiritual lives is told here by Mary, related in both her narratives:

A few weeks after we met, Clem told me of a spiritual message he had received some time earlier. Clem wasn't very religious. He usually went to church but spiritual messages were unusual to him. It was that 'He would meet me and recognise me, and later we would build a church.' Such messages were just as unusual for me at that time. I don't think we ever talked about it (Mary Robinson, *Divine Destinies*, 1982).

While this early lack of communication seems somewhat odd, it is perhaps understandable in an era when Australian *cockies*<sup>172</sup> were not given to speaking much about their religious experiences:

We loved one another, then and always, but our marriage was not a happy one. Clem didn't talk; he was a good man and a good farmer but appeared to be bored with my chatter. I was getting spiritual inspirations and needed to communicate them. I thought they were my own thinking. When I tried to pass them on to Clem he would turn away with a bored look and say nothing. But next evening, when we had visitors and I was in the kitchen getting supper, I would overhear him holding forth with my words as if they were his own. I

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<sup>172</sup> The word 'cocky' arose in the 1840s as an abbreviation of 'cockatoo farmer'. This was then a disparaging term for small-scale farmers, probably because of their habit of using a small area of land for a short time and then moving on, in the manner of cockatoos feeding ([http://www.anu.edu.au/andc/res/aus\\_words/aewords/aewords\\_cg.php](http://www.anu.edu.au/andc/res/aus_words/aewords/aewords_cg.php), accessed 25.9.2010).

didn't know whether to be mad at him or pleased that he thought them worth repeating.

Noel was born in 1935 and Ivan followed in 1937. About 1944 Canon John Bell, Anglican Dean of Perth,<sup>173</sup> became active by founding a Christian Community Movement and giving weekly talks on radio. He seemed to spark off dormant faculties in me and I found myself writing a lot of stuff that sounded good to me. So one day when Stanley Coxon, the local Anglican Minister, paid his usual visit I asked him to check out some papers.<sup>174</sup> He read half a page and threw it down and said. "I need a new teacher for my Coorow school students, will you take it". "But you haven't read anything yet", I replied. "I don't need to. You've got what I want," said he.

So I took it, but a few months later I was getting messages from Julie [her next child], before I knew I was pregnant. I had no intention of having more babies until I got stronger and was taking every precaution not to. However, that did not deter Julie. "I'm coming, Mum," was what I seemed to be picking up, as if she couldn't get here soon enough. Evidently time was running out for the Plan.

I got strong and well during the pregnancy and had an unexpected desire to have the baby. However I began thinking of going to Perth. When Julie was about a year old some of the local men, including Clem started a Boy's Club. Clem was doing well at that, so I gathered a couple of women and started a Girl's Club. Julie used to sit in the pusher and watch.

About this time I got a Spiritual Message, "That there was to be a New Era and that there was work for me to do in Perth" (Mary Robinson, *Divine Destinies*, 1982).

Such stories reveal how much value Mary accorded the personal sense of 'calling', and the desire to do some spiritual work for the 'New Era', even before she understood what this might entail. Now it is the 'call', and not the family, which dominates Mary's sense of self, Clem and even the children making only audiences for an increasingly centre-stage 'Mary'. The following account of this same from Mary's third-person narrative also identifies her transition to what could be called a *call-centred life*.

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<sup>173</sup> The following entry dates this period to be before Rev. Bell became Dean of Perth: 'St George's Cathedral, Institution, Induction & Installation, 11 December 1953 (J S Battye Library of West Australian History, Ephemera-Collection Listing (PR3707/14) (<http://www.slwa.wa.gov.au/pdf/ephemera/pr3707ord.pdf>, accessed 24.9.2010).

<sup>174</sup> That Stanley Coxon was a minister in the Anglican Church during the 1940s and '50s is verified by an entry in the Esperance Cemetery Records when he presided, then as an Archdeacon, at an Anglican burial ceremony: '...13.5.1954, Minister: Archdeacon Stanley Coxon' (<http://www.esperance.wa.gov.au/>, accessed 24.9.2010).

*They soon met at dances and picnics and at their first private meeting Clem told Mary that he goes to Church but is not a spiritual person but had been given a spiritual message that 'He would meet her and know her and that they would "build a church"'. In 1933 Mary married Clem Broun and went to live as a farmer's wife.*

*They had four children three boys and one girl. But the difficulties in communication Mary saw at the first night proved too much for her and after fifteen years she prayed fervently to God for an answer and the following clear direction was given: 'A New Era is unfolding and I have work for you to do in the city'.*

*Mary told Clem of the message and he agreed to put a manager on the farm and they all came to Carlisle to live.*

*Mary was in her element and soon made many friends. The family joined the Quakers and Mary became active in politics, holding meetings in their home. As the two eldest boys, Noel and Ivan became ready to leave school they wanted to take up land and be farmers like their father, so Clem went back with them to get them started. That started a period of comings and goings. Mary would take the young ones up for school holidays and Clem would come down frequently.*

Graham Broun does not quite see Mary's conclusions about Clem's vision of building a church in the same light:

I don't know anything about the years my mother spent in Coorow or any plans my father may have had to establish a church. ... I don't feel inclined to give that idea much credit. Personally I think things are not so clear cut. It would be easy for someone, like my father, to say something in passing about starting a church, but as to whether he meant to say it is another story (Graham Broun, email, 24.1.2010).

That Clem Broun was a man of few words is made clear by Graham:

I don't remember him speaking to me at any time about anything religious. His conversation was always understated in the extreme. Had he been my only parent, I may never have learned to speak at all (ibid.).

Further background about Clem Broun is helpful here in gaining an appreciation of the person Mary had married, and who was increasingly proving unable to fulfil her needs:

He was a good man and cared about under-trodden people. He had a lot of time for the Aboriginal people he had known and worked with over the years, but mostly he just liked growing things and listening to cricket on the radio.

My father was one of the youngest children in a very large farming family (of about twelve children). Strictness and old fashioned values were imposed upon him, and I suspect he wasn't expected to ask too many questions. His parents were actually born in the 1860s and I doubt if any of his family had travelled far from the Western Australian wheat belt areas, except in times of war (Graham Broun, email, 24.1.2010).

## Living in Perth and Son Ivan's death

Mary's first person account of the family growing up during the 'comings and goings' period briefly notes the tragedy of her second son's death, which I suspect, despite her ready spiritual acceptance, was less resolved than she may have thought at the time.

Perhaps the normal extended grieving process of such a loss was perpetually abbreviated, or in some way altered by the Spiritualist communications which she experienced after her second son's death.

So in 1948 we came to Perth and I got into all sorts of things, both political and religious and gained a lot of experience. In the midst of which Graham came along. Fortunately the Yeates family arrived when he was nine months old and Mrs. Yeates became Graham's nurse-maid.

In 1960, or there about, Ivan with the help of Noel and Erica [Noel's first wife] started a Youth Club which showed great promise for the youth of the district, until Ivan passed on in 1961.

Ivan had an inner awareness that he was going over and told me so. He also conveyed to others that he may be leaving them. As soon as I heard of his death I knew he had to go over and told people he had to go on. I never knew how I knew; it was coming from within (Mary Robinson, *Divine Destinies*, 1982).

The death of Ivan was thus considered by his mother as heralding a change in *God's Plan*. Mary's third person account details why Ivan was so important to this plan. Clearly Ivan was well loved in the district. When I visited the area in 2004, one lady told me how deeply affected the people of the district were when Ivan died, in a head on collision between a truck in his sports car. For Mary, he was the son with a direct link to the spiritual.

*Noel started a Christian Endeavour movement in Coorow and when it became Ivan's turn to lead he nervously scribbled notes and stood up to speak. Suddenly he found himself speaking fluently. In explaining the experience to Mary later he said, 'Mum, everybody was listening to me – and so was I'. Ivan was a born channel.*

*Their next move was to build a Youth Club which took off like wild-fire. All the youth for miles around met in the local hall, but Ivan was the attraction. Everybody loved him. He was so gentle and yet so wise. One day, in early 1961, Ivan told Mary that he had experienced some near misses on the road and had the feeling he may not always miss. He also talked to some of his closest friends, who later related that 'he seemed to be saying "good-bye"'.*

*On the thirteenth of June 1961, just one week after he turned 24, Ivan met with a head on collision and died instantly.*

*When the report was given to Mary she knew that he had been called home because the separation between Clem and Mary had made it impossible to build the church that he had come to lead.*

*Ivan made his presence known to both Noel and Mary within days, and Mary continued to communicate with Ivan for the remainder of that year; Ivan then told her, 'I must be about my Father's Business.'*

*With the loss of Ivan, the family in Perth, and Noel now married and on his own farm, Clem became lonely and suggested to Mary that they separate and be free to choose new partners.*

*This was a shock to Mary but she could see his difficulty and agreed, but asked for a six month reflection period. This was the May 1962 School Holidays.*

When someone feels as guided and directed by God as Mary Broun did, all the events of their lives take on a 'Divine' meaning and purpose. Two of Mary's dreams from 1962, recorded in her 'dream book' and provided by her eldest son Noel, clearly helped prepare Mary for the eventual break with Clem, something I doubt she would have initiated herself:

***Dream One:***

Clem, I and baby were standing on a magic mat in mid air. I felt in danger of falling off because Clem was veering off in his direction. I felt the urge to throw my arms around him and let him take the lead, but he said – I must learn to stand on my own two feet. A magic mat follows the thoughts and inclinations of the leader. How can there be more than one leader on each mat. For the sake of the baby I took the lead and brought the mat safely down. Clem slipped off but held on to the edge and was safe.

**Answer:** The finding of love with united direction (Mary Robinson's Dream Books, 13.2.1962).

***Dream Two:***

I had left my van one street back. I could have walked back for it. Mother suggested we hop on a train instead – it would have been easier, but in a few moments we found ourselves miles from our direction.

**Answer:** Do not hop on the first bus that comes along. Take time and trouble to ride in your own bus. Know where you are going – do not be led blindly (Mary Robinson's Dream Books, 5.4.1962).<sup>175</sup>

Mary, in her reflective writing of the 1980s, reviewed the loss of Ivan, the breakdown of her marriage to Clem, and the arrival of Fred Robinson in the light of a 'Divine Plan'

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<sup>175</sup> While these *Dream-Book* writings probably have material that would comment on other important happenings in Mary's life, I do not have access to them other than that which her son Noel has provided.

which she saw as flexible and able to be melded around the sometimes unwise decisions of humans – but still able to guide her life:

The Divine Plan had failed and was now to be changed, and Ivan, who was born into the family for the establishment of the Church, was now to work from the other side. In one of his communications he told me that he was working with communities, not only ours.

In less than twelve months Clem asked me for a divorce and I agreed, but asked for six months to be sure it was what we both wanted. At the exact end of the six months Fred came along and I knew we had work to do together (Mary Robinson, *Divine Destinies*, 1982).

This relationship between Fred and Mary was, according to these texts, based on ‘The New Era Work’ which they both felt they had been brought together to do. In Mary’s case she saw this as a stop-gap measure for a failed first marriage and thus it was seen as the *Plan B* of the ‘Divine Plan’.

## **Fred Robinson: In Perfect Timing**

Noel Broun’s account of Ivan’s death and Mary’s communications with her son in the months that followed makes clear the place of Spiritualism in Mary’s life, while depicting the happenings of an eighteen month period in which there was a death in the family, the linking up with Fred and the final split with Clem:

In June 1961 my brother, who was living on the farm at Coorow had a fatal motor car accident. It was a very traumatic time for all of us. Later in the year my mother took us to the Mosman Park Spiritualist Church where we learnt a lot about the After-Life. There was contact with my brother and it did seem to be very genuine. She also organised “[Ouija] Board Meetings” with a chap named Bill Murdock for about four months in early 1962; he started and finished these meetings with prayer and had a Bible on the table; once again these meetings all seemed to be genuine.

It was about this time that Mr. Fred Robinson was giving lectures at the Seekers Centre. As Fred had nowhere to live (having just arrived from Queensland) it was arranged that he could board at our place in Carlisle and sleep in our caravan. Mum and Fred seemed to have a similar outlook on life. Basically, to try to encourage people to live clean and healthy lives, free from pollution, corruption, drugs, alcohol and cigarettes, with an honest Christian outlook. At this point there was a growing incidence of drugs in society and this was of great concern to my mother.

Mum and Fred soon became a ‘team’ and worked together on various projects. My father in the meantime had returned to the farm – this was his life and he was not interested in the things of the city. Mum and Dad separated and eventually divorced and Mum then married Fred (Noel Broun, letter, July, 2008).

While Mary's third-person account of her relationship with Fred could be seen as restrained (being written during a difficult time in their relationship just prior to Fred's death) it still reveals a sense of the human enjoyment in their exciting early liaison:

*On the 13<sup>th</sup> November 1962 Fred Robinson entered Mary's house. A birthday party had been arranged for one of Mary's friends and Fred had spoken that day at the Seekers Centre.<sup>176</sup> Her friends who had heard him were so inspired that they rang and asked if they could bring him to the party.*

*Fred took over and they nearly forgot to cut the cake.<sup>177</sup> Fred then asked if anyone knew of a vegetarian home where he could stay while in Perth.*

The elephant in this *story-room* is that Fred was in effect a homeless itinerant, or at least a variant of a *vagrant* – what colloquial Australian terms a *rat bag*. I have chosen the term 'wandering sage' as it seems to suit him, and it is much more respectful of his religious and philosophic motivations, but there were many, including his own family in Queensland, who preferred the other more banal interpretation. In any case Mary took him in on that first day, and they began their life together:

*Noel took Mary aside and said, "Mum you could have him here." Mary modestly exclaimed, "Oh, no, I have no man here." Noel replied, "He could sleep in the caravan, it is well sheltered and then eat in the house. It is too good a chance to miss." And so it was that Fred Robinson came to live at Mary's house. Next morning Fred asked if there was a typewriter he could use. Mary set him up in her office and he promptly headed his article "New Age Information Centre". To Mary's query Fred replied, "Wherever I am is a New Age Information Centre." And so began a relationship that was to last for 21 years.*

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<sup>176</sup> It seems the 1960s Seekers Centre came out of a Spiritualists group formed in the 1930s, and later linked with a French religious philosopher with American connection, Dr. Serge Raynaud de la Ferriere (<http://digitalseance.wordpress.com/2007/05/14/serge-reynaud-de-la-ferriere/>, accessed 8.9.2011). De la Ferriere (1916–1962) founded the Universal Great Brotherhood (an organisation devoted to merging science, art, and religion) in 1948 in Caracas, Venezuela. He made a pilgrimage to India and the Himalayas before coming to Australia ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serge\\_Raynaud\\_de\\_la\\_Ferriere](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serge_Raynaud_de_la_Ferriere), accessed 8.9.2011). Ferriere's group is likely to have been the Western Australian connection mentioned by ROTA. This would make sense of Fred speaking first at this 'Seeker Centre Church' when he first arrived, even though Ferriere had by then left Australia. The story of these psychics, a UFO group, and an Ancient Lemurian Temple in the hills surrounding Perth (too tangential for further discussion here) is detailed in a 'Seekers Centre Magazine' mentioned by the 'insider' writer B. Perkins-Nagel in 'The Astroeth Story' (<http://digitalseance.wordpress.com/2007/02/22/secret-library-3-the-story-of-astroeth/>, accessed 8.9.2011). I was to meet Beatrice Perkins in the 1970s as a long time friend of Shalam.

<sup>177</sup> This comment says much about Fred Robinson's effect on social situations, while also revealing warmth in Mary's attitude towards his outrageous social ineptness and unthinking bombast.

Using the word ‘modestly’ as an adjective to depict her own moral propriety reveals how Mary not only wanted to ‘do the right thing’, but wanted to be seen doing it. Fred on the other hand didn’t care at all for conventional mores. He had spent the preceding thirty years breaking taboos, yet now he found himself linked up with someone who actually believed in social standards and censorship, and would never want to be seen traducing community values (unless they clearly challenged God’s laws). I remember Mary telling me of a recurring nightmare in which she was in the middle of Perth without her shoes. In terms of complementing each other’s qualities they were perfectly suited. According to Mary, Fred was not an easy man to live and work with. He certainly had very fixed ideas – yet Fred said much the same about Mary later in life. These difficulties can be perhaps better understood through an appreciation of Fred’s calling to *go talkabout*.<sup>178</sup>

### **Fred on *Talkabout***

Fred had spent over 10 years on talkabout before meeting Mary. Mary subsequently dedicated herself to Fred’s talkabouts during the 1960s and most of the 1970s. During the late 1970s and early 1980s (as Fred approached 90), the Community took central stage – and most of Mary’s attention. I too was fully involved with the day-to-day dramas of the Community, and had not been *press agent* for Fred’s lecture events for some years. Fred meanwhile became frustrated with the inactivity bought on by his advancing age, while he also found it hard to find congruence with changes in UBI’s policy, such as the allowance of *flesh foods*. Perhaps most of all, Fred was missing new *ears to bash*.<sup>179</sup> Fred would read of a new prophecy and wish to share his urgency with others – but Community members had become largely inured to his ‘dates’. Mary may have been more sympathetic to Fred’s thoughts about such prophecies than most Members, but she was not keen to go on talkabout with him – or let other members go

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<sup>178</sup> Fred refused to be confined for too long without the chance to share his story and teachings with new listeners. I have thus transposed the Australian term ‘go walkabout’: ‘a short period of wandering bush life engaged in by an Australian Aborigine as an occasional interruption of regular work’ (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walkabout>, accessed, 24.9.2010) into the neologism ‘*talkabout*’: a short period of wandering amongst the unconverted, engaged in by religious teachers as an occasional and welcome interruption from ‘living the good-life’ amongst their congregations. I too felt the urge to *go talkabout*.

<sup>179</sup> ‘*Ears to bash*’ and ‘*a lot of hot air*’ were self-deprecating terms Fred used about his own speaking. In later years such descriptions were increasingly becoming uncomfortable truisms; especially when relating his ever-urgent message of the imminent end of *the Piscean Age of analysis* and the start of *the New Aquarian Age of synthesis* via another Great Depression and an apocalypse.



on a tour with him. This effectively made it very difficult for Fred to leave the Community to spread his message.

Fred finally found some friendly people to stay with, and they were happy to have him as an honoured guest. While this time of separation was difficult for both Fred and Mary, they did, I observed, continue to love each other. I was at Fred's bedside when he died, and can attest to his avowed love for Mary, who, despite her sometimes harsh solutions to their personal problems, perhaps brought on by his somewhat erratic actions, was as dedicated to looking after Fred as she was to 'outworking' or 'practicalising' his overarching cosmic message through the Universal Brotherhood which he had instigated, then passed on to her to administer.

Some ex-members, almost exclusively those who had left in 1977, view this period as a time when Fred was 'made an outcast' from the Community he initiated. This theme is portrayed in the ABC TV *Compass* programme 'The Brotherhood' (Critchley 2009). While there was a period near the end when Fred and Mary did not sleep in the same dwelling (and that was their business), Mary always made sure that Fred was looked after. Fred spent time with her during the day and then had an evening meal in the home of UBI community members on a roster basis – and he was always an honoured guest. Neither Mary nor the Community 'ousted' Fred. It was his decision to 'go talkabout', for I remember unsuccessfully trying to talk him out of it. Accounts of exactly what happened near the end of Fred's life, and why Fred and Mary had this time of separation, are based on either conjecture or fragmentary evidence.

## **Building a Church**

While the following text from Mary could be seen as a rationalisation of the somewhat alienated position of a rebellious Fred in the Community around the time of writing of this 'Divine Destinies' text, I suggest it portrays Mary's genuine belief regarding Fred's part in 'the Church' which the Broun family *were destined to build*, first prophesied in Clem's religious experience. Mary's story dovetails with Fred's account that he had 'been blocked' on numerous occasions when attempting to come to Perth. Mary's story makes Fred *the wandering sage*, sound more like the Lone Ranger, who turns up to get

God's Plan back on track, then heads off to fix God's other messed up schemes.

Westerns were Mary's favourite film genre:

Fred was never intended to be part of the Brotherhood and often told me so. He would say that he was intended to spark off the Broun family and go on his way. He had been trying to come to Perth for some years. Not long after our family first went to Perth he tried to ride a bike across the Nullarbor, but nothing worked.<sup>180</sup> When the time was right he heard a loud voice saying, "When are you going to go to Perth?" He caught the next train, even though it was in the middle of the Commonwealth Games and the trains were full, a cancellation came through as he stood there.

And so the new Plan began its journey in 1962, just twenty years ago next month [placing the writing of this article as October 1982]. I soon found that Fred had no potential for the administrative work that was needed and I had little awareness of my own potential at that time. However, God provided me with good team mates and I soon found that God was ever ready to answer my every need. So with Ivan upstairs and me down here the Church has been built. The Universal Brotherhood was planned a long time ago in the region of Heaven where such things take place. My only regret is that my own family were not born into the environment of this little bit of Heaven on Earth that this turned out to be. It was their destiny that Clem and I failed to provide for them.

P.S. Graham was right when he said, "Ivan's death was a step into Heaven". I believe now that I saw Ivan on the 19.5.1980, when a group of Beings presented themselves to me, one at a time, in the Sanctuary during a service. Ivan was the 5<sup>th</sup> man. He had a serious scowl and I didn't recognise him. The others were all placid. Evidently the rules were that no emotion or recognition must be shown. He had good reason to be under strain, to be face to face with me and not show recognition. How I wish I could have recognised him (Mary Robinson, *Divine Destinies*, 1982).

For Mary the Broun's mission of 'building a Church' was fulfilled in the later development of the Universal Brotherhood Incorporated – in Mary's eyes the completion of that earlier commission from God.

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<sup>180</sup> This plan to ride the Nullarbor Plain on his push bike must have been one of Fred's possibilities after leaving ROTA in 1952 or thereabouts. *Summerland Scenes* mentions a 'branch' of ROTA in Perth, most probably run by Dr. de la Ferriere at the time, who taught Astrology and a version of twentieth-century mysticism with links to an independent form of Rosicrucianism, focussed on the 'New Age' and 'The Mission of Aquarius', which included the physical culture of exposure to the first rays of the sun, (de la Ferriere, *The Initiatic Centres*, <http://www.box.net/shared/t47c9jqmml>, assessed 8.9.2011). Although de la Ferriere almost certainly was Fred's Western Australian connection, by the time Fred came to Perth de la Ferriere had just died (December 1962), so Fred must have spoken to de la Ferrier's remnant alignees, and others drawn to the Seekers Centre. Fred and Mary were subsequently married there in August 1966.

The young Graham Broun was in a difficult position when Fred arrived on the scene. His memory of the time reveals a tense situation for everyone:

My earliest memories of Fred are of a fairly debonair “David Niven” type of gentleman, not the elderly, bearded guru others would have known. In 1962 and with me approaching 11 years old I was at a vulnerable age. My mother was married and her husband was my father, not Fred; and I was jealous of Fred. I would not have been quite normal had I not felt a bit threatened by his presence. I remember Fred trying quite hard to be nice and chummy towards me and I remember him buying me a present. None of his offers of friendship cut it with me though and so we never bonded, as would have been convenient for us all. Had I met Fred under different circumstances things may have been different. I think he was a much nicer man than I was ever willing to admit (Graham Broun, email, 24.1.2010).

Graham’s perceptions about his mother are well worth noting here, as they confirm the qualities that emerge within Mary’s own writing and the views of her other remaining son Noel.

People of our youth such as our parents and grandparents become like actors in the movie of our childhood memories. Some characters are as heroes and others like monsters. Fortunately I have no monsters in the mental movie of my childhood, though I do have some heroes. My mother, Mary Robinson, was one principal heroine of my earliest memories and also the heroine of some later scenes as well. She was physically small in stature, though large in dynamism. She was not highly educated but self taught and an endless questioner and thinker, particularly when dealing with politics, religion, and ethics. She was never afraid to ask questions. She liked to know.

My mother tended to put her heart into any endeavour she undertook, and often against her doctor’s advice. For her, life was a challenge and never boring. It’s been said she was like a butterfly, flitting from one idea to the next, absorbing whatever she fancied. From the view of an outside observer she may have appeared a little transient in her thinking and entertained conflicting concepts, but to her all things were part of the colour and pattern of the same universe ...

As a child, living with my mother was a little like living in a circus tent with characters of religious, political and new age environmental arenas passing through our home with their various acts to perform (Graham Broun, email, 31.12.2009).

At this point it is important to ask why Mary took up with Fred Robinson. In discussion with Noel, Mary’s eldest son (who had encouraged Mary to invite Fred to stay in the caravan outside her home), it became clear that she was in a vulnerable state. Mary had experienced three life-defining events just prior to *taking in* and *taking on* Fred. Within a two year period from the end of 1960 Mary had lost her much loved older brother Frank who unexpectedly committed suicide, followed by the loss of her twenty-four-year-old son Ivan in a car accident, and then Clem’s surprise request to ‘go their

separate ways'. These events, when combined with Mary's Spiritualist communications with Ivan, and non-communication with Frank,<sup>181</sup> and her ongoing investigative quest into various New Age groups movements must have had an effect on her.

When Fred arrived in her life she became fully engaged in a new mission: Fred Robinson's New Age Information Centre. His *Modern Revealed Knowledge* was seen to fill in the gaps in her understanding. This intense new focus and new knowledge helped her forget her personal losses. Mary became absorbed in living Fred's mantra: *impersonal selfless loving service for the benefit of the whole* – via his special project of starting an *Oahspean* styled Community. Added to these impersonal and selfless motivations, was Fred's personal charisma. As Noel put it, 'Fred was unique – there was no one else remotely like him – he was too good an opportunity for Mary to miss' (Noel Broun, telephone conversation, 8.9.2011). Graham, eleven when Fred appeared on the scene comments about their match:

I would say it was the lack of substance in her life after that [the deaths] which allowed her to drift into the Fred Robinson period of her life. Julie and Noel were married and Dad had suggested a divorce so she was free to follow her dream. Her dreams matched Fred's dreams. That's why she took him on. Life on the farm was extremely mediocre for her. She had done that for years but with only me around I could easily fit in with her Perth life (Graham Broun, email, 12.9.2011).

## Finding Shalam

The final few paragraphs of Mary's third person account of her life, her family and her meeting with Fred Robinson, construct a thumb-nail sketch of the outworking of the amended version of what Mary believed to be 'God's Plan'.

*Mary's friends who had been wanting to establish a community were enthusiastic at first, and a search for the ideal place began, but numbers began to dwindle as personal problems got in the way.*

*Finally Mary sold her house and a corner-block of land, which had become inflated by then, for a five acre property on a high peak hill above Armadale.*

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<sup>181</sup> This suicide in the family was not spoken much about. Even the Spiritualist teachings of the time judged suicide as *a crime against life*: the spirit of those who had suicided was usually not permitted to communicate with loved ones via the Ouija Board. For this reason Mary was unable to communicate with her brother Frank, while being quite able to communicate with her son Ivan (Graham Broun, email 7.9.2011).

*Fred and Mary were married at the Seeker Centre in Perth as soon as the divorce proceedings were finalised.*

*Their community began with one man who loved gardening and one lady who loved cooking and housework. This left Fred and Mary free to attend to the spiritual work.*

*They put out a monthly magazine and leaflets. People soon found their way there for days or weeks. The continued flow of people kept them fully occupied.*

I suspect that the ‘*divorce proceedings*’ were plural, meaning Clem’s with Mary, and Alice’s with Fred. I did hear from one of Fred’s family that Alice Robinson was devastated when she was formally asked to sign the divorce papers.

While the extant details of the first fourteen months at Shalam are covered in Chapter 7 Part 1: ‘Our Shalam Story’, it is instructive to see how Mary perceived the overall ‘plan’ of her life as she embarked on the Shalam enterprise. The experience she had gained from the various groups she became involved with over this early period is vital to an understanding of the way she worked as a founder/nucleus of the later Universal Brotherhood Community during the 1970s and ’80s. During the period just prior to meeting Fred, Mary’s increased sense of herself as ‘called’ and ‘chosen’ – *as a mystic with a destiny to build a church* – was becoming stronger. Even the personal challenges involved in the two family deaths and the separation with Clem (followed soon by the death of her mother), were seen as tests designed to strengthen her for a ‘destiny’, and sites for implementation of the spiritual teachings she was studying.

In Mary we see how books and personal experiments are leading to meetings, leading to projects, leading to groups, and finally to her own New Religious Movement. On the other hand we can see how Fred was picked up and swept along by movements and books (Douglas Credit, ROTA, *Oahspe*, *Urantia*, and *Flying Saucers*). Fred completely identified with a movement until he became enamoured of a new one, at which time he would cement selective teachings from his previous group into his evolving schema, then divorce himself from the group (as with ROTA); or else the group would divorce itself from him because of his eclectic use of its teachings. Fred tended to be an either/or and an all-or-nothing person. Mary negotiated her own way through movements, constantly seeking opportunities to explore new ones, but without dropping old ones.

## Part 2: The Movements and Groups of Mary Broun

Mary Broun was extraordinarily active in the religious, political, environmental, natural health, and New Age movements of Perth from the late 1940s until the intensity of her initiatives with Fred Robinson precluded her from an active involvement in so many local groups. Mary lost touch with most of her political and traditional religious associates once she met Fred and Shalam was functioning as a New Age Information Centre; however, she did, during the 1970s and '80s, receive many visitors at the UBI Community at Balingup who knew her from the 1930s through to the '60s. Having learnt about the Community from the numerous press articles, these earlier associates from the political and religious domains, wanted to see her again and evaluate for themselves the progress of the communal experiment initiated by the Robinsons. Mary always appreciated *The Work* of individuals and groups who aligned themselves with 'transformation' of some kind. Few New Religious Movements of the time were as eclectic as the Universal Brotherhood.

While it has been difficult to trace and reconstruct the details of her associations with the groups she had joined or been affiliated with, it has been possible to identify the main organisations, to measure the level of support she gave to them, and to some extent the involvement she had in them. These groups included the Anglican Church, and almost all Christian denominations connected with the Cooperative Christian Movement, the World Council of Churches, and the Religious Society of Friends. These I have categorised as the *Traditional Religious Churches*. Under the heading of *Political Organisations* I have included the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the Australian Labor Party, the Australian Communist Party and the Australian Council of Trade Unions. Under the heading of *New Religious Movements* I have identified the Spiritualist Church, Christian Science, Scientology, the Subud Movement and the Ascended Master Groups.

Both Fred and Mary focussed on sharing information to create fused or hybrid tenets that worked along with, between or were embedded in other tenets from a range of religious positions. I am using the word 'religious' here in its broadest social sense, as positioned by Durkheim:

... under a Durkheimian definition of religion, such overarching frameworks for human life as Marxism, nationalism or the ethic of sexual liberation would be called 'religion' just as Christianity or Judaism would be, because all of these fulfil essentially similar social functions (Berger 1976, p. 380).

The Robinsons' views were not original positions. Neither ever claimed to be the 'source' of knowledge. Fred always said '*We are simply an information centre; we have collated Modern Revealed Knowledge from our reference sources*' (lectures, 1970s). Naming Shalam a 'New Age Information Centre' makes it clear that the Robinsons felt that they were not originators of anything in particular, but simply conduits, collectors, collators and disseminators of Aquarian Information, and Cosmic/Universal Law, which they often simply termed *New Age understandings*. Mary was to contribute as much to the movement as Fred. Without Mary's political and traditional religious background, and her interest in an eclectic range of New Age movements, Fred would have focussed much more on his two main reference sources – *Oahspe* (1883) and *The Urantia Book* (1955).

## **The Traditional Religious Groups**

It was religion which really motivated Mary Robinson. While she *enjoyed* sport and dancing, was *entertained* by Westerns, was *concerned* about social issues, was *engaged* in politics, she really *loved* God. So it is no surprise that she was most at home in the religious domain, or as she later preferred to call it, spirituality.

## **The Anglican Church**

As Mary's autobiographical sketch reveals, it was the local Anglican Church at Coorow where she first cut her religious and spiritual teeth. In the first six years of her marriage to Clem, while living in a 'humpy', Mary, as well as teaching scripture at the local school, soon became involved in her work of hybridising thinking from somewhere between the churches, as well as working with a specific church in which she worshipped – at this time Anglican.

Mary was a genuine 'seeker'. She asked questions and proffered thoughts to religiously inclined people with equal confidence. If Mary didn't understand something a speaker was saying, she would say so, without worrying about how she might appear to others.

She had a rare kind of intellectual courage, born of a personal quest for inner knowledge that was supported by her prayer life. In this sense Mary was like a sponge soaking up what speakers, groups or churches could offer her in understanding life, God and how she could serve other people. The following extract from Noel Broun's biographical sketch reveals her broad eclectic, even ecumenical streak:

During these six years on the first farm, Mary became very conscious of a desire to explore and promote matters of a spiritual nature. She had taken on the task of teaching the scripture class to the local school children and became active in association with numerous church leaders of the day. Some of the ministers she has listed in her diary notes are as follows: Rev. G. Cameron (Presbyterian), Rev. S.A. Chauvel (St. Pauls Church, West Perth); Rev. Cannon John Bell (Anglican [later to become the Dean of Perth]), Rev G.H. Wright (a Council of Churches representative of Presbyterian Congregational), J.S. White (Congregational Union Meeting), M.N. Andrew (Chairman of Congregational Union), Rev. P. Clark (Former New Britain Missionary), C.H. Denny (Church of Congregational Union), Archdeacon Stores (Anglican), Mr. Urquhart (Bible Institute), A.E. Holloway (Baptist Church), J.E. James (Methodist) (Noel Broun, Biographical Sketch, 2008).

### **Cooperative Christian Movement**

In her own way Mary Broun was quite a networker. Noel, in his biographical sketch of these years, mentions her involvement in the Cooperative Christian Movement (CCM). While I have been unable to trace this group, Mary also mentioned to me that she had become involved in the World Council of Churches. This must have been during its formal establishment in the late 1950s, when its name was the Western Australian Committee for the Australian Committee of the World Council of Churches. Wisely the group did not endeavour to turn this into an acronym. The Council of Churches of Western Australia, as it is now called, 'has been involved with ecumenical advocacy and social justice works, for around half a century' (<http://www.churcheswa.com.au/who/our-history/>, accessed 15.7.2008).

### **Moral Action Alert**

This bringing together of Christian Church leaders was something which Mary initiated again during the 1980s with her 'Moral Action Alert' campaign. A group was to be made up of Christian Ministers in the South-West city of Bunbury, and designed to highlight moral degradation, particularly in the area of soft-core pornography. The idea had been sparked by a public debate about girlie magazines displayed at child-height at the local newsagencies.



I was coopted by Mary to be its public instigator, figurehead and mouthpiece, while she remained somewhat in the background, guiding it, and writing her always-published letters to the local press, the *South-West Times*. The movement first hit the State ABC news when Mary and I asked the local police to accompany us into a Bunbury newsagent to confiscate lewd magazines from the rack of a bewildered newsagent owner. While no charges were laid it did create the publicity we wanted, for we had invited the local press along to make sure people were alerted to the *moral action* we were taking. This was to be a *Gandhian* protest group awakening the moral conscience of concerned Christians – and it would place the Universal Brotherhood as the unlikely upholders of community standards.

While the idea of an organised *moral-panic platoon* was seen as anachronistic by most members of the UBI Community, including myself, we all went along with it – its main appeal being that it was, in a twisted way, ‘counter cultural’. Mary explained the idea to us thus: ‘Moral Action Alert (MAA) will be our contribution to the district, an instance of *thinking globally and acting locally* regarding the exploitation of the female body for the benefit of men’. Put like that it sounded very reasonable. I got the local Catholic Priest, Father Bernie Dwyer, involved. I had met him while hitch-hiking and he had become a friend of the Community. While this was a win, the more evangelical churches were having nothing to do with this MAA campaign. Fred’s publicised UFO theories were seen as ‘unbiblical’, while the UBI was seen (especially by those calling themselves *Born Again Christians*) as being party to ‘the work of the Devil’ – they had their own moral-panic about us. As a New Religious Movement the UBI was suspect to all but the Catholic Priest.

The broad-based Christian campaign Mary had in mind ended up as being The Universal Brotherhood and the Catholics. In answer to my question: ‘How come you Catholics are the most supportive of us?’ Fr. Bernie replied, ‘The Church has made a lot of mistakes. I like to think the Spanish Inquisition taught us something’. We developed a good relationship with the Bunbury Catholic priests. I occasionally stayed with them overnight. Father Bernie ran a marriage encounter session for us; we held a ‘Right to Life’ meeting at the Community; and one of our members became involved with the

Catholic-recommended Billings Method of contraception. This connection with the Catholic Church, via Father Bernie, was a welcome surprise for Mary, whose own father had fallen-out with the Church, leading him to refuse Mary a childhood religious education.

Mary's morality can be depicted as being drawn from her father's inherited (but rejected) working-class-Catholic morality, and her mother's Church of England and Methodist puritan streams of Protestantism. Mary was a *temperance woman* and proud teetotaler – but cannot be fairly called a 'wowsers'. She loved dancing of all kinds, even encouraging me at a communal 'fun-night' to perform a gyrating 'Elvis-the-pelvis' party-trick impersonation of *Hard-Headed Woman*.<sup>182</sup> Some female members (quite properly) found my thrusting too suggestive, but Mary saw it as a letting-our-hair-down harmless release. While loving dancing and good humoured skits and plays (even ones that sent up our religious and spiritual predilections), she was strictly anti-gambling (even raffles), and anti-swearing and consciously blasphemous utterings. Her morality was always based on considered cultural consequences. For instance, the Community rule about disallowing cohabitation between newly arrived unmarried couples, was, rather than centred on prudishness, connected to her feeling of responsibility towards any children who might be born without the security that a marriage indicated. She saw that with so many young people coming to stay, the community for which she felt responsible could be left literally holding-the-baby, if one of the 'hippie types' felt that it was time to move on to India for some meditation.

### **Traditional Protestantism Not Enough**

The work with the traditional Protestant Churches was to be only a start for Mary, as her son Noel makes clear:

Mum was not content that the message of the local church was the 'ultimate', and for her it was somewhat lacking. She felt there was much more to be sought after for a

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<sup>182</sup> 'Hard Headed Woman' is an American 12 bar blues most notably recorded as a rock 'n' roll song by Elvis Presley for his the film *King Creole* (1958) ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hard\\_Headed\\_Woman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hard_Headed_Woman), accessed 26.2.2011). The humorous lyrics (which I still know off-by-heart) relate a tongue-in-cheek truism: 'Well a hard headed woman/ a soft hearted man/ been the cause of trouble/ ever since the world began ... oh yeah' (<http://www.lyricsfreak.com/e/elvis+presley/#share>, accessed 27.2.2011). As already mentioned Mary did love Elvis. I remember commiserating with her in 1977 after Presley died, and her saying something like 'Elvis was a good lad who was led astray ... he would have benefitted much if he had the good fortune of being in a place like this' (pers. comm., 1977).

greater spiritual awareness ... the local churches seemed to be bogged down with little to offer (Noel Broun, biographical sketch, 2008).

Mary was very supportive of the Christian Youth Groups that Noel and Ivan started in Coorow, helping to start a 'Girl's Club' after Clem and his friends started a 'Boy's Club'. Mary's ongoing concern about youth issues led her to organise evenings of wholesome entertainment at the family home in Carlisle. These sorts of events were to be precursors of the 'fun nights' which she instituted in the UBI Community over twenty years later.

Mum was concerned about the rising consumption of alcohol in the young people so she organised numerous party nights on our front lawn where we had square dancing, musical items and a lot of good clean fun – but no alcohol. They were a great success and very popular with the local people (ibid.).

Mary's love of Square Dancing was also instituted in the community. While we did enjoy the dancing, it was another example of an anachronistic activity working side by side with futuristic ones: Mary's love of square dancing and her belief in a *flying-saucer-lift-off* were an eclectic mix to be sure.

Mary's search for something deeper than the traditional church culture, led her to the silent worship that existed in the Society of Friends.

### **The Quakers**

Sometime soon after Mary came to Perth in 1948 she joined The Society of Friends – the Quakers – and this became her most stable religious base until the formation of the Universal Brotherhood. She could, within the Society of Friends, be a member of anything else she was investigating, while still feeling she had a spiritual home. Mary *maintained a loose link* with the Perth Quakers throughout her Shalam days and the development of the Universal Brotherhood Community. Many times she would refer to Quaker practices such as the procedure for hearing a 'Concern', and the way that a 'Meeting for Business' was structured. She often likened the 'CentreCore' of the Universal Brotherhood Inc. to the 'Elders' of the Society of Friends. The concept of 'harmonious agreement' was in Mary's eyes modelled on the Quaker style of consensus: an acknowledged agreement to take a course of action without having to compromise one's position.

The political activism of the Quakers, combined with the mystical element of spontaneous spiritual experience that could lead one to be ‘moved to speak’ out of the silence, had an attraction for Mary, as it did for me. The link formed between us via our mutual involvement with the Quakers (in both of our *pre-Fred* lives) was perhaps a bond that kept us working together for as long as we did. In the 1970s we attended Quaker Meetings together on a number of occasions. On some of these we jointly addressed the meeting, sharing what we were attempting to do at the UBI Community.

### **The Evangelical Churches**

Mary’s son Noel was particularly interested in the American evangelist Oral Roberts.<sup>183</sup> While Mary was interested and happy that Noel had found religious sustenance from this evangelist she did not become involved. The Christian Evangelical Church was not her cup of tea – especially since they were so keen on denouncing the New Age as the work of Satan.

### **The Political Movements**

While religion was Mary’s first priority, she was very much concerned about issues of peace and freedom for everyone. Mary saw that the political domain was important and that to play a meaningful role in society she would need to become involved with other women who were doing something about it. It is not surprising she became a member of a group which was doing just that.

### **Irene Greenwood and WILPF**

Mary was involved in the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) for a number of years during the 1940s and ’50s. While I know she was the Secretary of this movement for a time, I have been unable to find out the exact period from the WILPF archivist. As its Secretary, Mary worked closely with Irene

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<sup>183</sup> Granville Oral Roberts (1918 – 2009) was an American Pentecostal televangelist and a Christian Charismatic. He founded the Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association and the Oral Roberts University. As one of the most well-known and controversial religious leaders of the twentieth-century, Roberts’ ministries reached millions of followers worldwide over six decades. His healing ministry brought American Pentecostalism into the mainstream, while he also pioneered television evangelism and laid the foundations of the *prosperity gospel* and *abundant life* teachings. A 1972 *Time Magazine* profile of Roberts relates that he ‘...sat 3,000 on metal folding chairs’ where ‘he shouted at petitioners who did not respond to his healing’ ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oral\\_Roberts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oral_Roberts), accessed 24.9.2010).

Greenwood. Noel Broun verified the relationship between his mother and Irene Greenwood, saying that he ‘well remembered the name being spoken in the home’ (Noel Broun, telephone conversation, 7.7.2008). In understanding more about Mary Broun as the political activist and politically savvy Principal of the Universal Brotherhood, it is useful to briefly examine her mentor during her WILPF years.

Irene Adelaide Greenwood (née Driver, 1898–1992) was eighteen years old when she became interested in issues of social justice. She shared her mother’s concern for the oppression of Indigenous Australians and women. The following entry reveals the pedigree of this feminist, peace activist, pacifist, broadcaster and writer:

A tireless campaigner and activist for over fifty years, Irene Adelaide Greenwood’s interests in feminism and the peace movement were formed through her mother Mary Driver’s involvement with the Women’s Services Guild. The achievements of Greenwood’s life’s work are considerable and her commitment and energy were recognised in the many awards bestowed on her. These include Member of the Order of Australia, the first woman to receive an Honorary Doctorate at Murdoch University, recognition as the strategist behind the implementation of the Chair in Peace Studies at Murdoch University, the United Nations Association of Australia Silver Peace Medal and honorary life membership, Queen’s Silver Jubilee Medal, appointment to the National Advisory Committee on Women’s Affairs in 1974 and the naming of the flagship of the State Ship’s Fleet *M.V. Irene Greenwood* in her honour. Greenwood was also a life or honorary member of many key international, national and state peace and women’s organisations (<http://www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE0805b.htm>, accessed 7.7.2008).

It is likely that Mary’s work with Indigenous Australians came out of her association with Irene Greenwood:

One thing I do remember well is when Mary had a group of Aboriginal people around to teach them square dancing on the front lawn. This was most unusual for that time, and she did this on a few occasions. She was involved in lots of social work and politics. I was too young to understand what she was doing, but I know she was fully involved in whatever it was. Mum loved looking after little Graham who was a baby and toddler then. I think that made it possible for Mary to do more of that sort of work (Brenda Yeates, telephone interview, 8.7.2008).

WILPF currently monitors, lobbies and networks at local, national and international levels on a wide range of issues for women and the pursuit of peace, justice and human rights for all. Their web site includes the following as issues of concern:

Disarmament and political solutions to international conflicts; reconciliation, land rights and peace accord/treaty process in Australia; elimination of racism and all forms of discrimination; economic justice – ending poverty; environmental sustainability; making a difference by writing a letter or signing a petition (<http://www.wilpf.org.au/about/home.htm>, accessed 8.7.2008).

Mary's political activities prior to her Universal Brotherhood days help place her as much more than a mixed-up mystic and the self-appointed nucleus of a defunct New Age Religious Movement. Certainly Mary was a mystic, guided by strange dreams and visions, but she was also a capable administrator, who was extremely functional in the practical organisational affairs of both religious and social justice domains, such as the Quakers and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

Mary's writing campaigns as Principal of the Universal Brotherhood through her regular letters to the *South West Times* during the 1970s and '80s had their genesis in this period. Writing a letter or sending an email is still a key activity of WILPH: 'Write a letter – even a very short one; Talk to someone today about the issues; Get involved at the local level; You do make a difference!' (ibid.). These methods of 'making a difference' were all legacies of this group which Mary adopted and took with her into the NRM she helped to form – and these were healthy messages of involvement with society. Unlike Fred, Mary Robinson never thought to cut herself (or the UBI she co-founded) off from society; on the contrary, she always had the desire to influence, reform, and transform society. While Fred was waiting for it all to end in a mighty cataclysm, Mary was engaged with the day-to-day happenings of the world. Mary was an avid listener to the news, always learning from what was occurring in society; and where she thought she could do or say something that could be helpful, she did. While Fred wanted to create a Community to disconnect with the *polluted world*, Mary wanted to create a Community to more meaningfully connect with the *wayward world*.

While Fred's off-the-planet, space-peopled, prophetic Aquarian cosmology was initially somewhat disturbing for this practical woman, she took on the job of making Fred's spiritual vision a practical reality, amending the message and bringing it more down to earth – at least politically speaking.

Although WILPF was important to her, it was not enough for Mary to be part of a lobby group. She also had the desire to become involved in the main game of politics, to play a small part in helping to form the policy for the government of the country. Mary was not a spectator, she was an active participant. Involvement with politics was inevitable.

### **The Australian Labor Party (ALP)**

Mary Broun was initially inspired by the Australian Labor Party's John Curtin, the 'man of peace', the anti-conscription activist from World War I, who became Australia's reluctant Prime Minister during World War II. Mary liked the way he lived a simple life, going to fight the War alone in Canberra, leaving his family in Western Australia. I am convinced that Mary Broun in her thirties positively enjoyed Curtin's 'Austerity' campaigns, so much so that there were times she would instigate similar regimes within the UBI Community, in an attempt to train us for imagined future difficulties. It must have been frustrating for her that we knew nothing of her thinking, born of the frugality of the depression years and the dedication of the war years. It was almost impossible for middle class 'hippies' to comprehend the social history of the Curtin years which Mary experienced as she raised her family. The resonance between Mary's calls for 'making do with what you have' (during the UBI years) with the following extracts from a speech delivered by John Curtin during the Second World War is useful in understanding the austerity and frugality that were so much part of her make up:

We can meet this menace only if each of us as individuals becomes conscious of the high price that victory is going to demand ... We have to turn every energy and every resource of the nation to the purposes of war. We can do this only if we live the simple lives of people who realise, clearly realise, they are fighting for their existence. That is why austerity is as much a condition of the mind and the soul as the material manifestation of a determined effort to do everything necessary for victory.

Each of us must freely and voluntarily abandon all those distractions, luxuries and purchases that unnecessarily employ manpower, materials, machinery, plant and capital that could be utilised in the war effort (Curtin 1942).

While Mary was an energetic, alert and politically active person, interested in issues of social justice, much of her motivation was intertwined with her religious convictions, particularly her commitment to the Society of Friends, which had its own ethos of austerity, born of its history of religious persecution. In a strange way Mary's empathy with and support for the marginal, the outsider, the other, or the underdogs of society (a term she often used), was strong, and almost independent of her religious life. Graham

Broun comments on his mother's energy for politics, the 'contrary-Mary-bucking-the-system streak' which I had referred to in the draft I sent him, and her membership of the Australian Labor Party. He includes some family history which was largely unknown to me. When understood it makes more sense of her political convictions and directions:

I think that a lot of my mother's vitality came from her father. He was a man who questioned authority and blamed his local Catholic Church for hounding to death his own mother. He was from an Australian mining family, brought up in poverty in the Ballarat area of Victoria during the early days of the twentieth-century. As a child he found himself working down a mine and I think he had within him some growing anger and questions about the ethics of Australian politicians and religious leaders. This was after the Eureka Stockade era, but the sentiment remained stewing amongst the Irish mining community. As descendants of an Irish convict, sent to Australia, (arriving early in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century) the O'Dwyer family had strength of purpose and a keenness to buck the system.

My mother's mother's family on the other hand were Church of England and far more conservative in their thinking. My mother may have carried a little of the O'Dwyer fire and keenness to question authority, but she also carried the contentment of her mother's family. Whilst her father looked with glee at the rise of Communism, early in the twentieth century, my mother identified with neither the radical left nor right of politics, being content with the middle of the road Labor Party politics of the mid-twentieth-century. This is not to say she was a Labor Party supporter in all ways. She tended to examine individual issues as they arose and there are aspects of modern day Labor Party policies she would find hard to accept. Her greatest political concerns revolved around the welfare of ordinary working class people (Graham Broun, email, 31.12.2009).

Certainly Mary was involved in the Labor Party. She actively campaigned for Colin Jamieson when he first entered politics in 1953.<sup>184</sup> I remember Mary talking about her earlier campaigning for Jamieson when I joined the Labor Party in the early 1980s. Mary's concern for the 'ordinary working class people' (ibid.) led her in the early '50s to briefly explore the Communist Party of Australia.

### **The Communist Party of Australia (CPA)**

Mary was most active in politics after the Second World War when the Communist Party of Australia and the Australian Council of Trade Unions were closer than they had ever been.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Colin John Jamieson, AO JP (1923 – 1990) was an Australian Labor Party politician, serving as a member of the Western Australian Legislative Assembly from 1953 until 1986. He was Leader of the Opposition from 1976–1978 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colin\\_Jamieson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colin_Jamieson), accessed 23.6.2010).

<sup>185</sup> The Second World War created a significant feeling of sympathy for the Soviet Union amongst Australian workers, and the CPA attempted to take advantage of this by industrial agitation after the war ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australian\\_labour\\_movement#Friendly\\_Societies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australian_labour_movement#Friendly_Societies), accessed 23.6.2010).



During the life of the Universal Brotherhood Community, and in response to issues of equity, Mary often quoted the most well known of Karl Marx's aphorisms: 'From each according to their ability, to each according to their need' – she believed this 'human' maxim, almost as deeply as she believed in 'divine' maxims like the Golden Rule.<sup>186</sup> Mary was always a socialist.

Mary was I suspect appreciative of the Australian Communist Party's support of the Trade Union Movement – to which she was fiercely loyal.<sup>187</sup> Reading Marx alone would not have been 'investigating' for Mary. It was her style to attend meetings, to gauge a movement from personal experience. So Mary did, perhaps on the strength of their support for Australian workers, attend a meeting of the Communist Party of Australia. Noel Broun's description of what happened reveals that Mary was perhaps more far-sighted than many socialist intellectuals who supported Stalin's Communist Russia after World War II – until they became aware of Stalin's purges in 1956.<sup>188</sup>

In the early 1950s, we as a family, were invited by my Auntie Mary (also named Mary Broun, being my uncle's wife), to attend a meeting of the Australian Communist Party in Carlisle. After the meeting we had a discussion and my mother concluded by saying she would have nothing to do with them as they were 'atheistic' (do not believe in God) and have a policy that 'the ends justify the means'. She said that they will use lies and false information to gain their own ends. We were told to steer well clear of Auntie Mary and her family. I am not aware that Mum's attitude to communism ever changed (Noel Broun, letter, 12.8.2008).

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<sup>186</sup> The Golden Rule is an ethical code that states one has a right to just treatment, and a responsibility to ensure justice for others. It is also called 'the ethic of reciprocity'. It is arguably the most essential basis for the modern concept of human rights ... A key element of the Golden Rule is that a person attempting to live by this rule treats all people, not just members of his or her in-group, with consideration ... The Golden Rule has its roots in a wide range of world cultures, and is a standard which different cultures use to resolve conflicts ... its most common English phrasing is attributed to Jesus of Nazareth: 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you' (from Mathew 7:12; Mathew 22:39 and Luke 6:31 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Golden\\_Rule](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Golden_Rule), accessed 7.7.2010)).

<sup>187</sup> Mary often wrote in support of the Trade Union Movement during the 1970s and '80s while Principal of the Universal Brotherhood. Her articles were almost always published, and were invariably 'Unionist' in opinion. She convinced the mainly Liberal-raised members of the UBI to appreciate Unionism.

<sup>188</sup> In the power struggle triggered by Stalin's death in 1953, Nikita Khrushchev, after several years, emerged victorious. On February 25, 1956, at the Twentieth Party Congress, he delivered the 'Secret Speech' denouncing Stalin's purges ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikita\\_Khrushchev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikita_Khrushchev), accessed 23.6.2010).

While Mary appreciated and endorsed the separation of Church and State she could not abide any form of denigration of Religion by the State. Communism's negative stance on religion made it impossible for her to support it in any way, while making it incumbent on her to denounce it as a valuable contribution to society.<sup>189</sup> However this did not stop her from citing any of *Marx's valuable truths* as worthy of adoption in the alternative society she later envisioned.

Having said this it is likely that Mary had earlier supported Curtin's position in lifting the ban imposed on the CPA by Robert Menzies.<sup>190</sup> Mary was a supporter of the freedom of groups and movements to exist as long as they were not carrying out illegal or underhand activities. By the late 1950s it is just as likely Mary would have supported Menzies' ban.

### **Bob Hawke, Kim Beazley and Mary Broun**

While Mary appreciated what the Australian Council of Trade Unions was doing for Australian workers, she absolutely adored its later leader Bob Hawke. I suspect she knew Bob's father, Clem Hawke, a Congregational Minister who had brought his family to Perth in 1939. Mary became Bob's special fan once he had been elected President of the ACTU in 1969, when he began shaking up both the organisation and Australia with his bold optimism; she loved the way he challenged the *status quo*. Mary could forgive Bob his drinking and womanising, for he was 'from a good family' and she firmly believed he would 'come good'.

When Hawke gave up drinking in May 1980 and *readied himself for his destiny to lead the country*, Mary was as proud of him as if he had been her own son; she also admired his appreciation of the Israeli Kibbutz movement,<sup>191</sup> and his interest in paying a 'living

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<sup>189</sup> Stalin followed the position adopted by Lenin that religion was an opiate that needed to be removed in order to construct the ideal communist society. By the late 1930s it was dangerous to be associated with religion in Russia ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph\\_Stalin#Religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Stalin#Religion), accessed 23.6.2010).

<sup>190</sup> The ban on the Communist Party was lifted in late 1942 while John Curtin was Prime Minister, arousing much public debate. Russia had joined the Allied cause and were helping to turn the tide of the war against Germany. Australian Communists were seen to be supporting the Allied war effort. The part that Russia played in the defeat of Nazi Germany further encouraged the growth of Communism within Australian trade unions (<http://john.curtin.edu.au/letters/activities/communism.html>, accessed 23.6.2010).

<sup>191</sup> The word 'Kibbutz (plural *kibbutzim*) is Hebrew for 'gathering, clustering'. Kibbutzim in Israel were traditionally based on agriculture. Today, farming has been partly supplanted by other economic

wage'. Following up the feasibility of making some kind of living wage available to those responsible communards doing something similar to the *kibbutzniks* which Hawke had seen in the *kibbutzim* in Israel, the UBI was visited by Kim Beazley.<sup>192</sup>

I remember Beazley saying to me. 'This is a great idea, but the difficulty is going to be how to distinguish between a group like this doing meaningful work and the drug communes where children are neglected'. We never heard back from him. Despite the outcome, Mary was thrilled that Bob had sent Kim to investigate the UBI. She had known Kim Beazley's father and mother during her politically active days. Being a good runner in early life Mary had also followed Kim's mother's success as an athlete, and as the coach of Olympic gold medallist Shirley Strickland.

By about 1987 Mary had become disillusioned with then Prime Minister Bob Hawke. He had not been interested in a book on conspiracy theories (with personal letter enclosed) which she asked me to hand to one of Hawke's minders during a handshake event in Bunbury during 1984. Mary had hoped Bob would see the truth of the world-wide conspiracy. We heard nothing, of course. I was not talking to Mary much by 1987 but Noel reports the following:

With regard to Bob Hawke – although she was always a supporter of his – towards the middle of his term as Prime Minister Mum was clearly disappointed in him and told me that 'he should take a walk – a long walk' (Noel Broun, letter, 12. 8.2008).

### **The ALP and the Universal Brotherhood**

Mary got me into politics during the Hawke era too. The idea was to use my speaking skills to advance the causes which Mary thought the Universal Brotherhood should bring to light through the Western Australian Burke and national Australian Hawke Governments – both elected in 1983. This involved me and another CentreCore member joining the local Bunbury Branch of the Labor Party in 1982 (for Mary was to correctly

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branches, including industrial plants and high-tech enterprises. Kibbutzim began as utopian communities, a combination of socialism and Zionism. In recent decades, many kibbutzim have been privatised and changes have been made in the communal lifestyle. A member of a kibbutz is called a *kibbutznik* (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kibbutz>, accessed 13.6.2011).

<sup>192</sup> Kim Christian Beazley, AC (1948 – ) is an Australian politician, diplomat and academic. He is currently the Australian Ambassador to the United States. Beazley previously served in the Australian House of Representatives from 1980 to 2007. He was leader of the Australian Labor Party and Leader of the Opposition from 1996–2001 and from 2005–2006. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kim\\_Beazley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kim_Beazley), accessed 13.6.2011).

prophesy that Hawke would soon lead the party and win the elections – proving to be a more accurate prophet than Fred ever was). So in 1983 at both State and Federal elections I found myself handing out how-to-vote cards. Mary and I were invited to attend a barbeque event celebrating Brian Burke’s election on his thirty-sixth birthday.<sup>193</sup> I took my chance to schmooze with the new, suave, but portly and balding premier, who was born in the same year as me. I well remember because it was our common age that I used as a lame and inappropriate conversation opener – the comment encouraged a somewhat wistful remark about my slimness, and my full-head-of-hair. I enthused about the yoga I was then doing, and was about to recommend it to him when he caught someone’s eye, calling them over to intervene and effectively terminate the conversation.

I thus became the willing public mouthpiece of my mentor, and the enthusiastic spokesperson of Mary Robinson’s positions to the State Labor Party. Mary chose the subjects and gave me a few pointers while I embellished them with my own creative flair and delivered speeches on such topics as why soft-core pornography should be kept above child height in newsagencies, and why casino-gambling was anti-social and unnecessary in WA (a topic at that time). As a proxy-delegate of the Bunbury Branch at the next State Labor Conference I had my say. Shocked at the way people were chatting while I and others spoke, I gave them a powerful preacher-style serve, not quite a rant – at which they shut up for a minute or two.

That Mary was to employ the modest success of the Universal Brotherhood, and my speaking skills, to make some points about the importance of values in society, reveals that she was interested in the welfare of society during the life of the Community. While politics and social work were important to Mary, and while she did take her interest in them into the Universal Brotherhood, it was Mary’s involvement with the New Age movements of the era that most defined her role as the UBI’s *Principal* and *Nucleus*, and as Black aptly depicted her: ‘The Discerner’ (1984, p. 19).

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<sup>193</sup> Brian Thomas Burke (25.2.1947 – ) was Labor Premier of Western Australia from 25 February 1983 until his resignation on 25 February 1988. Burke was imprisoned for seven months in 1994, after being convicted of rorting travel expenses. In following decades, Burke continued to maintain his Labor party contacts and parliamentary influence, using them to further his career as a pro-business lobbyist ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brian\\_Burke](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brian_Burke), accessed 23.6.2010).

## Spiritual and New Age Movements

While there were perhaps many more New Age influences on Mary Broun during the period before she met Fred Robinson, I have commented only on the groups and movements which she clearly and purposefully investigated. It is useful at this point to quote a short piece from Noel Broun's sketch of his mother's activities about how she approached new ideas:

In 1953 Mum heard about a man called George Adamski and his then recent book *Flying Saucers Have Landed*. He was coming to Perth so we all went to meet him and hear his lectures and purchase his book. Mum was also interested in a healthy diet and learnt a lot from Harry Benjamin's book [1926]. Over the next 8–10 years there were numerous groups that Mum heard about. She attended their meetings for a while and learnt what they had to offer (Noel Broun, letter, 12.8.2008).

While books as well as groups influenced Mary Broun, I will not attempt a literature review of all of these, focussing more on those books which were supported by discussion groups, public meetings or New Religious Movements.

## Spiritualism and Clairvoyance

Under this heading of spiritualism, I have already included some of Mary's early and defining spiritual experiences, which can be generically categorised as *clairvoyant gifts*. One of the most noteworthy events in Mary's early life, and one she often told to 'Seekers' in the 1970s, revolved around what she considered to be a life-saving vision. Her son Noel tells the story:

When Mum was in her late teens, travelling on a bus she suddenly was given a vision of her father on a capsized yacht 400–500 yards out from shore at Mandurah. He was not a strong swimmer. Mum immediately prayed. In answer a man walking the beach turned his head and saw the yacht disappear – he raised the alarm and a rescue boat was sent out to rescue her father and a second man. After that incident mum was aware of a clairvoyant gift she had, which came to her mainly in the form of dreams. She learnt how to interpret the dreams and this became regular guidance for her for the rest of her life. Hundreds of these dreams are recorded in her diary books (Noel Broun, biographical sketch, 2008).

Mary made close friends of some of the Spiritualists she met while attempting to contact her dead son Ivan. One person who had a great influence on her was Rose Atkinson, whom I met on a few occasions in the early days of starting the Community. I remember her giving me a wad of 'writings' which had purportedly 'come through her'.

I read a few but did not quite know what to do with them – a bit like Christmas cards; I kept them for a number of years until I had a purging of my clutter. Noel Broun confirms my memory of the friendship Mary had with this Spiritualist: ‘One of Mary’s main friends was Mrs Rose Atkinson who was a clairvoyant and practised in the art of automatic writing or channelling’ (ibid.). While channelling was to become a major part of both Fred and Mary’s life when they began working together, at this point it seems to have been simply an aspect of Mary’s unremitting ‘search for truth’.

Spiritualist communications, but without a Ouija board, and re-framed as ‘channelling’ were to continue to play a major part in Mary’s life with Fred Robinson, and then in the lives of members of the Universal Brotherhood. The effects of these spiritualist communications, with samples of the specific messages which the Robinsons were to disseminate across the world, are canvassed in Chapter’s 7–11.

### **Philippine Healers**

Mary had heard about the Philippine Spiritual Healers, or Psychic Surgeons,<sup>194</sup> and decided to make a visit to them to see if the favourable reports she had received could be verified through her own experience. Mary was convinced that they were genuine and that they were saving lives that traditional medicine could not help. Her son Noel confirms that ‘Mum heard about the Spiritual healers in the Philippines so she travelled there and spent a while observing their work and was most impressed’ (Noel Broun, biographical sketch, 2008). Mary also took an 8 mm film of her time in the Philippines (this film has been lost).

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<sup>194</sup> Psychic surgery is a procedure typically involving the supposed creation of an incision using only the bare hands, the supposed removal of pathological matter, and the seemingly spontaneous healing of the incision. It first appeared in the Spiritualist communities of the Philippines and Brazil in the mid-1900s. Medical professionals and sceptics consider it sleight of hand ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychic\\_surgery](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychic_surgery), accessed 28.6.2010).

## Christian Science and Positive Thinking

I know Mary had during the mid 1950s investigated Christian Science.<sup>195</sup> She told me she had both read Eddy's main books and had absorbed their teachings by attending some of their meetings. While she appreciated this group and its positive spiritual schema, Mary believed that the physical world was real, that evil did exist, and that disease is often the result of poor dietary choices – all of which she felt conflicted with Christian Science. Mary could not go along with a tendency towards extremism which she felt was present amongst some members of the group she attended; and this was particularly so regarding their avoidance of treating illnesses by employing physical healing methods simultaneously with 'spiritual healing'.<sup>196</sup> While Mary was a strong proponent of prayer and positive thinking, she felt that God had also provided the knowledge of material medical science and naturopathic methods for the benefit of mankind, and therefore it was unwise to deny the value of these sciences as an adjunct to spiritualised thought and healing prayers. Mary therefore concluded that the physical and spiritual systems of healthcare were complementary rather than oppositional.

Mary's appreciation of both spiritual healing and medical practitioners was to play an important part in the life of the Universal Brotherhood. There were cases of near death through blood-poisoning and anaemia during the 1970s and '80s when earnest visitors and Members, keen to effect their own natural and prayer-mediated health care, were sometimes ordered to hospital by Mary, quite literally saving some lives. So while Mary taught many of the precepts of Christian Science (without referring to them as such), she was insistent that the young people for whom she felt responsible, were going to receive the benefit of modern medicine when needed. Having said this, Mary was fiercely against the taking of unnecessary drugs. Her stance regarding her own

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<sup>195</sup> Christian Science is a religious belief system founded by Mary Baker Eddy in 1866 and is practised by members of The First Church of Christ and other non-members. Its central texts are *The Bible* and the Christian Science textbook, *Science & Health with Key to the Scriptures* (1875) by Mary Baker Eddy. In this textbook, Mary Baker Eddy describes her religion as a complete and coherent Science which is both demonstrable and provable ... Christian Science asserts that man and the universe are spiritual rather than material in nature, and that truth and 'goodness are real, whereas evil and error are illusive products of a fictitious material existence ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian\\_Science](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Science), accessed 27.6.2010).

<sup>196</sup> The health care of those for whom Christian Science is the preferred mode of treatment, is typically not attempted through drugs, surgery, or other conventional methods but through Christian Science treatment, a specific form of prayer intended to spiritualise thought. While there is no formal compulsion on Christian Scientists either to use Christian Science healing or to eschew medical means, Christian Scientists avoid using the two systems simultaneously in the belief that they tend to counteract or contradict each other ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian\\_Science](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Science), accessed 27.6.2010).

healthcare was that she saw a doctor as an advisor. Sometimes she might decide against taking the advice offered, nevertheless she regarded it as useful – and she appreciated the medical perspective in helping her work out for herself the course of action she should take.

Mary was perhaps more attuned to a less intense and more popular contemporary take on positive thinking that was enjoying success through the writings of Norman Vincent Peal. *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952), his ‘controversial signature work’, had ‘helped “Pealism” penetrate the mainstream culture’ (George 1993, dust-jacket text). Mary had certainly read Peal’s contemporary take on Christianity, but while she appreciated positivity, she also knew she must find a way to clear some of the inhibitions and phobias that held her back, which had dogged her since childhood. Thinking positively was not enough for her. She needed a technique to work through her past.

### **The Church of Scientology**

It is understandable that Mary did not volunteer much about her association with the Church of Scientology.<sup>197</sup> Even in the 1970s Scientology was controversial, and Mary was conscious that it was not her place to teach what this group had taught her. Nevertheless, Mary would not hesitate to acknowledge that her own ‘auditing process’ had been helpful to her, and that the book *Dianetics* (1952) had been a step on her path.<sup>198</sup> To my knowledge Mary never did practise Scientology techniques on the

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<sup>197</sup> The first Scientology church was incorporated in December 1953 in Camden, New Jersey by American science fiction author L. Ron Hubbard ... who stated that: ‘A civilisation without insanity, without criminals and without war, where the able can prosper and honest beings can have rights, and where man is free to rise to greater heights, are the aims of Scientology’... Scientology teaches that people are immortal spiritual beings who have forgotten their true nature ... Its method of spiritual rehabilitation is a type of counselling known as ‘auditing’, in which practitioners aim to re-experience consciously painful or traumatic events in their past in order to free themselves of their limiting effects. Study materials and auditing courses are made available to members in return for specified donations ... Scientology describes itself as the study and handling of the spirit in relationship to itself, others, and all of life. One purpose of Scientology ... is to become certain of one’s spiritual existence and one’s relationship to God, or the ‘Supreme Being’. One of the major tenets of Scientology is that a human is an immortal alien spiritual being, termed a *thetan* that is presently trapped on planet Earth in a physical ‘meat body’. Hubbard’s Church stemmed from his self-help system, based on his first book *Dianetics* (1950) ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church\\_of\\_Scientology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_Scientology), accessed 27.6.2010).

<sup>198</sup> First published in 1950 as *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, or *Dianetics: The Evolution of a Science* (1952) (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dianetics>, accessed 27.6.2010).



members of the UBI Community. She did not ‘audit’ anyone, nor use an E-Meter.<sup>199</sup> She saw Scientology as but another group that had increased her understanding of life and reservoir of knowledge. Some things she learnt were negative learning experiences – what not to do.

Drury and Tillett state that Mary had ‘formally been a Scientologist’ (1980, p. 32). A search of the records of that period by the archivist of the Perth Church in 2008, did not locate her as ever having been a member – which fits with her assurance that she was only ever a ‘seeker’, investigating and exploring the movement and its techniques. Mary’s eldest son remarks, ‘she was following it for a little while but soon decided it was a money making concern and did not join’ (Noel Broun, telephone conversation, 28.6. 2011).

In 1977 Mary spoke with a practising Scientologist who had formed an *anti-anti-cult group*, the Better Family Relations Association (BFRA), an organisation formed to counter the work of the Concerned Parents and Citizens Group (CPCG), the *anti-cult group* initially set up by a parent of one of our UBI members. While Mary refused an invitation to sit on the board of the BFRA she did cooperate with their request to ask the parents of our members to write to the State Attorney General, Ian Medcalf, to present ‘the positive side and the happiness that their children have found in your group’ (O’Donohue, 1977). A letter to Mary Robinson from the BFRA Secretary, Audrey O’Donohue, includes the following:

The opposition has been busy seeing MPs to get legislation passed against minority religions. We are counteracting this move by seeing as many as we can simply to present the other viewpoint and move their attention to reaffirming and upholding the constitution (O’Donohue, letter to Mary Robinson, 28.44.1977).

Mary appreciated this initiative, particularly the critique of ‘deprogramming techniques used by American Ted Patrick’ (Mary Robinson 1977, Press Release). However, I well

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<sup>199</sup> Auditing in the context of Dianetics and Scientology is the confidential activity where a person trained in auditing listens and gives auditing commands to a subject, which Scientologists refer to as a ‘*preclear*’. Auditing involves the use of questions asked or directions given by an ‘*auditor*’. Most auditing sessions employ a device called the Hubbard Electropsychometer or *E-Meter*. This device measures changes in the electrical resistance of the preclear by passing approximately 0.5 volts through a pair of tin-plated tubes ... attached to the meter by wires and held by the preclear during auditing. Changes in electrical resistance are believed by Scientologists to be a reliable and a precise indication of changes in the reactive mind of the preclear ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auditing\\_\(Scientology\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auditing_(Scientology)), accessed 29.6.2010).

remember Mary's caution about the idea of linking up with Scientologists whose focus might be more on self-preservation than that of the groups caught up in this kidnapping of adult family members (Mary Robinson, pers. comm., 1977). It is important to remember that Mary had been through the period when Scientology had been banned in Australia.<sup>200</sup> Mary did not want the UBI to be officially connected with the Church of Scientology in any way – and yet there was ambivalence. She did want to see responsible and open groups survive any similar banning of NRMs instigated via the publicity of the anti-cult groups like the CPCG. Scientology had become an emblem of all that was wrong with NRMs or 'cults'. Mary wanted the Universal Brotherhood Incorporated to be the shining light of New Religious Movements in Australia – the darling of the media. She genuinely wanted to have a peaceful and open relationship with society, something she saw as the opposite of Scientology, which she assessed as being too aggressive and too secretive.

Mary could not agree with a number of the beliefs and practices of the Church of Scientology during the 1970s and '80s. In particular she thought that certain types of psychiatry could be most helpful, whereas Scientology did not.<sup>201</sup> Mary was for instance an advocate of the psychiatric methods that came out of the experiences of Victor Frankl.<sup>202</sup>

Mary also thought that Scientology's methods of proselytising and their charges for services were bordering on unethical. While she was careful not to accuse them, she

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<sup>200</sup> Based on the findings of the 1965 Anderson Inquiry, the Church of Scientology was restricted from forming under that name in Australia. The ban in Western Australia lasted from 1968 until 1972 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientology\\_in\\_Australia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientology_in_Australia), accessed, 29.6.2010).

<sup>201</sup> Dedicated Scientologists are encouraged to deny any psychiatric care their doctors may prescribe to them ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church\\_of\\_Scientology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_Scientology), accessed 27.6.2010).

<sup>202</sup> Victor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* (1946) chronicles his experiences in German concentration camps and describes his psychotherapeutic method of searching for, and finding a reason to live. Part One constitutes Frankl's analysis of his experiences in the concentration camps, while Part Two introduces his ideas of meaning and his theory of *logotherapy*, which is considered the third Viennese school of psychotherapy after Freud's psychoanalysis and Adler's individual psychology. It is a type of existentialist analysis that focuses on a *will to meaning* as opposed to Adler's (Nietzschean) *will to power*, or Freud's *will to pleasure*. Rather than power or pleasure, logotherapy is founded upon the belief that it is the striving to find a meaning in one's life that is the primary motivating and driving force in humans ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Man%27s\\_Search\\_for\\_Meaning](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Man%27s_Search_for_Meaning); <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Logotherapy>, accessed 7.7.2010).

distanced herself from their style of recruiting and their methods of conducting the business side of their ‘church’. Mary was always a true believer in the ‘love offering’, free contribution method of running a spiritual organisation. She would not agree to charge anything but nominal rates for rent; and disallowed most of the accepted forms of fundraising, such as raffles or selling products that were not good value or quality. There was one accusation that could never be made about the Universal Brotherhood – any issues in relation to its financial affairs.

## **Subud**

According to her diary notes of 1959 (Noel Broun, letter 6.6.2008) Mary and some of her family members had become connected with the Subud Movement.<sup>203</sup> This has been verified through the Subud records by their current archivist, accepting that the spelling of ‘Broun’ became ‘Brown’:

Mrs. Mary Brown, 268 Orrong Road, Carlisle – 16.4.1959; Mr. Clement McBride Brown of the above address – 16.4.1959; Mr. Noel Brown, Coorow WA – 25.6.1959 ... None of the above names are included on the register of Perth Subud Members dated May 1960 so they must have been involved only for a very short period (Amalijah Thompson, email, 3.10.2008).

While only a year of membership may seem to be a short period of involvement in this group, the intensity with which Mary Broun engaged in her investigations makes a full year of focussed interest a substantial influence. In the early days of this connection, sometime prior to her April membership date, Mary experienced an ‘opening’.<sup>204</sup> It is likely that Mary took Fred to meet the founder of Subud, Pak Subuh, on March 1<sup>st</sup> 1963 when he visited Perth to receive an ‘opening’.

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<sup>203</sup> Subud is an international spiritual movement that began in Indonesia in the 1920s founded by Muhammad Subuh Sumohadiwidjojo [Bapak or Pak, as he is known to members]. The basis of Subud is a spiritual exercise commonly referred to as the *latihan kejiwaan*, which was said by Muhammad Subuh to represent guidance from the ‘Power of God’ or ‘the Great Life Force’. There are now groups in over 70 countries, with a current worldwide membership of about 10,000 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subud#The\\_Opening](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subud#The_Opening), accessed 28.6.2010).

<sup>204</sup> The ‘opening’ refers to a person’s first *latihan*, which is specially arranged to pass on the ‘contact’ like a candle flame to a new candle without any reduction in the quality of the flame. Only after the opening is a person able to receive for himself and is then encouraged to participate in the group latihan ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subud#The\\_Opening](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subud#The_Opening), accessed, 28.6.2010).

There are elements of Subud that played into the experience of the Universal Brotherhood; for instance the practice of *asking a question of the Master* in a group setting is one of the techniques Mary introduced to the group, likely to have been borrowed and hybridised from Subud – to suit *the need of the moment* in the Community:

People who have been practising the *latihan* for some time claim to be able to recognise indications or intuitions ‘from their inner feeling’ in response to questions that are put forward ... However, it appears that such indications often defy intellectual analysis and that the supposed guidance can be obscured or biased by the mental or emotional attitudes of those present ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subud#The\\_Opening](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subud#The_Opening), accessed 28.6.2010).

Mary, like Fred, did not hesitate to use ideas which she had learnt via several groups, ‘mixing-and-matching’ ideas to create new forms. *Asking a Question of the Master* is also likely to have also been influenced by Quaker ways of sitting in silence to find ‘harmonious agreement’ about a ‘concern’. These techniques are further supplemented by methods of Spiritualist communication with ‘Ascended Masters’. The aggregate is cemented together with a well known Biblical quote: ‘For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them’ (Mathew 18:20, KJV). Eclectic mixing of teachings was freely, and proudly, employed in the creative development of UBI’s New Age Alternative Society which was to be largely Mary Robinson’s artefact.

### **Ascended Master Groups and Affirmations**

Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, the founder of Theosophy, was the first to present the teachings of the ‘Ascended Masters’ to the modern world.<sup>205</sup> While Theosophy has undoubtedly been the major influence on New Age discourse, in the 1950s Mary Broun’s first contact with what she called the Work of the Masters (Fred called them *Elder Brothers*) stemmed from the American writer and metaphysician Baird T.

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<sup>205</sup> The Ascended Master Teachings derived from the Theosophical concept of Masters of Ancient Wisdom or ‘Mahatmas’. They are believed to be spiritually enlightened beings who in past incarnations were ordinary humans, but who have undergone a process of spiritual transformation ... Originally presented by H.P. Blavatsky in the 1870s ... they were further developed by Leadbeater, Bailey, Roerich, Hall and Heindel *et al.* ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ascended\\_master](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ascended_master), accessed 1.7.2010).

Spalding's series, *The Life and Teachings of the Masters of the Far East* (1924).<sup>206</sup> Controversy amongst the ranks of New Age believers must have intensified when Spalding's biographer and former colleague shared his belief that the 'contacts' did not take place as readers were led to believe.<sup>207</sup> However this has not stopped the popularity of this series, still a major foundation-stone upon which the *Ascended Master Teachings* are based.

The following quotes (from a revised edition of the 1924 first edition) of Baird T. Spalding's *Life and Teachings of the Masters of the Far East: Volume 1* (1937) sets the scene for all the other 'Ascended Master' groups which Mary attended both before and after meeting Fred Robinson. I have included two extended quotes, as they outline what could be called the *Ascended Masters Paradigm* – a paradigm accepted as a given by Mary Broun and Fred Robinson. This *Robinsonian* 'knowing' was to affect the lives of hundreds of baby-boomers in the 1970s, who were to enter an established movement – where the miraculous was treated as a normal part of a New Age future. Many of us countercultural-organic-gardeners believed we were starting something new, whereas we were, in the eyes of the Robinsons, completing something well established – the demonstration of the teachings of 'Great Masters' as reported to Baird Spalding:

In Presenting *The Life and Teachings of the Masters of the Far East* I wish to state that I was one of a research party of eleven persons that visited the Far East in 1894.

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<sup>206</sup> Spalding's series describe the travels to India and Tibet of a research party of eleven scientists in 1894. During their trip they claim to have made contact with 'the Great Masters of the Himalayas', immortal beings with whom they lived and studied. This close contact enabled them to witness many of the spiritual principles evinced by these Great Masters translated into their everyday lives, which could be described as 'miracles'. Such examples included walking on water, or manifesting bread to feed the hungry party. Despite questions about Spalding's authenticity, his books have remained in print since his death and his stories have helped to popularise the concept of Ascended Masters – a common meme in New Age and alternative religious movements during the twentieth century. During the 1920s Spalding was a personal acquaintance of Guy Ballard, founder of the I Am Activity. Similar themes to Spalding can be observed in the writings of Elizabeth Clare Prophet of The Church Universal and Triumphant. Growth of the New Age movement during the 1970s resulted in a renewal of interest in Spalding's texts. Although Spalding claimed he was born in England in 1853, reveals he was born in North Cohocton, New York in 1872. He died in 1953 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baird\\_T.\\_Spalding](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baird_T._Spalding), accessed 1.7.2010).

<sup>207</sup> David Bruton, Spalding's biographer revealed in *Baird T. Spalding As I Knew Him* (1956) that Spalding's books were a magical autobiography and essentially fiction ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naacal#Mention\\_in\\_.22The\\_Life\\_and\\_Teaching\\_of\\_the\\_Masters\\_of\\_the\\_Far\\_East.22\\_Vol.\\_2\\_.281927.29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naacal#Mention_in_.22The_Life_and_Teaching_of_the_Masters_of_the_Far_East.22_Vol._2_.281927.29), accessed 1.7.2010). While I do not wish to suggest that other authors' recorded experiences, or all other such reports about Ascended Masters are fictitious, it is clear that the *recorded miracles and events* related to Spalding's 'experiences', while thought to be 'real' by New Age readers over three generations, are likely to have been exercises in 'irrealism' (see footnote 36).

During our stay – three and a half years – we contacted the Great Masters of the Himalayas, who aided us in the translation of the records, which was a great assistance in our research work. They permitted us to enter into their lives intimately, and we were thus able to see the actual workings of the great Law as demonstrated by them. We call them Masters which is merely our name for them. One living the life described herein is entitled to reverence and consideration as a Master ...

This book, which will be followed by others of the Sun Series, gives the first year's experience of the expedition in relation to the Masters. It includes their teaching, which was taken by us stenographically at the time, with their permission and approved by them (Spalding 1937, Foreword, vol. 1).

Prior to meeting Fred, Mary also became involved with two New Age Ascended Master groups, the I AM Activity,<sup>208</sup> and the Bridge to Freedom Movement.<sup>209</sup> These groups were seen to have validity because she saw them as extensions of the 'research' and the 'experiences' of Spalding – especially the understanding and application of a 'Great Law' or 'God's Law' which Spalding assured his readers they would soon inherit:

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<sup>208</sup> The Saint Germain Foundation Website site explains the genesis of the I AM Activity movement:

'In 1930 Guy W. Ballard, hiking in northern California, met the Ascended Master Saint Germain on the side of Mount Shasta. His remarkable experiences are recorded in the books, *Unveiled Mysteries* and *The Magic Presence*, written under the pen name of Godfré Ray King. First published in 1934, the books have never been out of print.'

The site goes on to explain the group thus:

'The purpose of the Ascended Masters' "I AM" Activity is to bring help from Their Octave of Life. Mankind must have more than ordinary assistance to stand against the accumulation of mankind's disobedience to the Laws of Life ... The aim of the true seeker of the Light is to protect all that is constructive; to maintain God (Good) Ideals by dedicating one's Life to God in the highest and most powerful way possible; and to bring forth the Fulfilment of God's Divine Plan for all embodied in America, and every nation, and all who come in the future ... The parent organisation is [the] Saint Germain Foundation, with worldwide headquarters located in Schaumburg, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. It is represented throughout the world by 300 local groups termed "I AM" Sanctuary®, "I AM" Temple®, "I AM" Study Groups®, or "I AM" Reading Room®. Saint Germain Foundation and its local activities are not affiliated with any other organisations or persons' (<http://www.saintgermainfoundation.org/>, accessed 29.9.2010).

<sup>209</sup> The Bridge to Freedom is an Ascended Master Teaching religion. It was established in 1951 by Geraldine Innocente and other 'Students of the Ascended Masters' [from the I AM Activity stream], after she received what was believed to be an 'anointing' to become a 'messenger' for the Great White Brotherhood ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Bridge\\_to\\_Freedom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bridge_to_Freedom), accessed 29.9.2010). The web site of the custodians of these teachings, the Ascended Master Teaching Foundation (AMTF) claims that

(T)here are over 6,000 pages of original dictations. The instructions are a practical guide in reaching the goal of all life, namely the gaining of mastery over energy and vibration, and gaining the ascension. This teaching is designed for those individuals, who are searching for the highest aspect of truth ... After extensive research of the teachings of the "Bridge to Freedom," the AMTF was founded in 1980, with the exclusive goal of continuing the work of the original "Bridge to Freedom Activity." Therefore, the Ascended Master Teaching Foundation is the successor to the "Bridge to Freedom." With over 70 publications, the AMTF features the most complete literature in the field of the teachings of the Ascended Masters. All books have a white cover, stamped in gold. These colours symbolise the Ascended Master Retreat of Shamballa, the headquarters of the Great White Brotherhood, now located in the etheric realm. The temples of this retreat are constructed of white marble, with a golden roof. The AMTF uses as its logo the Golden Lamp of Truth which is the symbol of the Brotherhood of Truth (<http://www.ascendedmaster.org/>, accessed 29.9.2010).

In presenting these notes of experience with the Masters, I wish to emphasise my personal belief in the powers of these Masters and in their demonstration of a great Law – a Law that must carry a profound message to the whole human race. They proved conclusively that there is a Law that transcends death and that all humanity in its evolution is slowly moving forward to understand and use it. The Masters say this Law will be brought forth in America, will be given to the world and then all may know the way to Eternal Life. This, they acclaim, is the unfoldment of the New Age.

None of the manifestations referred to in these notes were the materialisations of the ordinary séance – far from it. It was higher expression making the body visible and invisible at will – a glorifying and spiritualising of the flesh. There is a God Law and human beings will soon inherit it, become illumined and use the body with understanding in full Masterhood.

There is no question but these people have brought the Light through the long ages, and they prove by their daily life and works that this Light does exist just as it did thousands of years ago (Spalding 1937, vol. 1, p. 157)

The popularisation of the *Ascended Masters Paradigm* was perhaps as much due to the writings of Spalding as to those of Blavatsky or other Theosophists that followed. The capture of the New Age by North America was certainly largely a result of the influential Spalding, who had a well-connected network, including for instance Alexander Graham Bell: ‘Our family knew him very well’ (Spalding 1955, Vol. 5, p. 173). Spalding never shrank from detailing his own connections: ‘I worked with George Washington Carver, and I knew Luther Burbank from the time he was six years old’ (ibid., p.169).

The ‘networked’ paradigm: influences spreading from those ‘illumined’ to the groups of seekers, dominates all of these movements; in itself a pragmatic explanation of their power. Mary Broun thus becomes a notable agent of such ‘illumination’ in Australia’s New Age circles.

It is useful here to reflect that the New Age centre of most relevance to Fred Robinson was Heindel’s Rosicrucian Fellowship Headquarters at Mt Ecclesia, Oceanside California. Fred ‘*knew*’, through Heindel’s contact with the *Elder Brothers*, that California was where the New Age was to begin. Later, Ione Long *picked-up* that California had failed in its mission, and that the New Age *Cosmic Power* had jumped the Pacific to the East Coast of Australia – Queensland. Once ROTA failed to fulfil its mission, and Fred had met Mary in Perth, he assumed that this cosmic energy field had jumped west – to Perth, where Mary had developed quite a network of groups from her

own associations. Ideas about the Earth's 'spiritual energies' were gaining currency in the New Age collectivity from the late 1960s. When I met Fred he suggested that Shalam, was itself on a specific 'Power Point' within the energy grid of Western Australia's energy field. Hollywood actress Shirley MacLaine, amongst others, has developed these ancient concepts of holy energy sites for popular New Age consumption.<sup>210</sup>

Mary's footprint in these Perth New Age groups is extremely faint by 2010, so I was not able to uncover all of her activities within these groups; but I remember her telling me about them, and recommending the teachings of Spalding and Guy Ballard (a.k.a. Godfré Ray King), the founder of the I AM Activity<sup>211</sup> and the author of *The Magic Presence* (1934) and *Unveiled Mysteries* (1934). Mary taught Community members how to use the 'affirmations' or 'decrees' which she believed the Masters had recommended. As Mary's involvement with Ascended Master organisations overlaps with the joint activities of the Robinsons in the next chapter, I will not investigate more of these Ascended Master groups here. I will however comment on the number of groups Fred and Mary had explored, and the difficulty the later Community faced in coming to terms with *the conflicting interpretations of truth* presented by these groups.

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<sup>210</sup> Shirley MacLaine's Official Website is a portal for New Age *Truth* on a wide variety of subjects; one being Sacred Sites:

Our ancestors knew that ley lines, earth grids and vortexes were energy sources and centres that were to be considered holy. They knew that Mother Earth supplied their physical needs, cured their ills and balanced their spirit. Mother Earth had also supplied the invisible forces of Earth energy. They respected the strength of these unseen powers and knew they were a place to heal physical, emotional and spiritual pain. Used as a place of communion with the Creator, our ancestors knew that these energy points uplifted the group or individual consciousness and fortified the soul (<http://www.shirleymaclaine.com/articles/sites/article-315>, accessed 3.8.2010).

MacLaine's site can be joined for a fee-based membership that offers vicarious *closeness* to MacLaine via a 'Behind the Scenes with the ShirleyCam' facility, providing members with 'an intimate look into my "reel life" and video clips from my movies, theatre performances, television specials and speaking engagements' (<http://www.shirleymaclaine.com/membership/features.php>, accessed 8.10.2011).

<sup>211</sup> The Secretary of the I AM Temple, at 54 Elizabeth Street, East Cannington, Western Australia, was able to confirm that Mary Broun-Robinson had been involved with the I Am Activity; but only via the memories of those who knew her and had since passed away. Mary survives in the memory of this group as a person who appeared in a 2009 *Compass* television documentary, and had once been a member. There were I was told no archives of that period that could trace her involvement (Secretary of I AM Temple, telephone conversation, 1.8.2010 [name withheld on request]).



## Too Many ‘New Age’ Sources

The effect of the many sources of both of the Robinsons’ New Age information is worthwhile exploring before they converge in the conglomerate schemata which evolved during the 1960s. It is important to note that during the 1970s and ’80s neither of the Robinsons recommended that those who came to them as ‘seekers’ directly explore the groups which they themselves had learnt from – to experience the truths through the sources as they had experienced them. The Robinsons believed that they had *brought together the essential elements* of a wide range of groups, and were being guided to create an eclectic spiritual-mix that combined the best of all the political, social, religious, and New Age movements in the world at that time – in their words ‘*the essence of all the teachings we have absorbed up till now*’ (Fred and Mary Robinson, conversations, 1970s).

Being like a sponge ready to absorb the truth was a favourite trope of Mary Robinson – used to describe a good seeker’s attitude – and it was quite different from her way of describing her own *spiritual butterfly* method of ‘seeking’. The difference was that a butterfly moves about to various flowers, while a sponge simply absorbs from one central source. In this case that source was the Robinsons’ New Age Information Centre, where the *Truths* had been collected, and perhaps been pasteurised and homogenised, to be fed quickly to our generation – *whilst there was time* – as Fred reminded us. There was no need to learn the long way, as they had done, learning through experiencing the groups they had investigated. *As the vibrations were speeding up*, we could learn all we needed much more quickly. In practice, and in the long term, the idea was unsuccessful. There was such a hodgepodge of theologies, philosophies and techniques it was almost impossible to digest them – the first step towards *absorption*. Most ‘seekers’ suffered from spiritual overload in the first weeks. Those whose constitution could take the excess of ideas and ideals, perhaps focussing on doing things, stayed. Some who remained longer in the Community found themselves more attracted to one of the Robinsons’ teaching sources, and would then leave the group to explore that stream of spirituality. Some left disillusioned with all notions of religion or spirituality – opting for involvement in no group.

I for one was not very supportive of those who wished to leave the community to follow one of the teachings we had *essentialised*. Like Fred and Mary I came to believe we had more than enough ‘truths’ for anyone to absorb – and I was perhaps right, but not in the way I had conceived. We simply had too many ‘truths’, with too many conflicts between them – and most people were unprepared to leave their unresolved questions *in the corner of their consciousness* (as Fred recommended) for very long. There is an old saying amongst *spiritual finders* that is given as advice to *spiritual seekers*: ‘When trying to tap underground water it is better to dig one hole forty feet deep than forty holes one foot deep’. This is sound advice – unless you happen to be digging in the wrong spot.

As the following chapter reveals, the Robinsons, once they came together, began their collaborative mining of the various New Age teachings. They never stopped digging.

## **Section III: New Age Praxis 1962–1971**

### **Chapter 7: The History of Shalam as a New Age Information Centre**

This section of the study (Chapters 7–11) follows the lives of Fred Robinson and Mary Broun-Robinson from the time they started their work together, through their marriage and various travels, until late in 1971 when I met Fred Robinson in Sydney. The data include private letters and in-house circulars, with print media representations. The extant texts produced by the Robinsons themselves provide insights into their *pioneering years* when they created *a model of God's Way of Life* – the seeding of a Back-to-the land New Age Countercultural Alternative Society on their property in the hills just outside Perth. This initiative was the *prototype* of the Universal Brotherhood, which I have depicted as a New Religious Movement Community.

As indicated in the ‘Notes on the Text’ section (p. ii), when quoting words, terms or sentences generally used by either or both Fred and Mary *I have used Times New Roman font in italics*. I have not used parenthesis for these integrated indications of their voices; they are not direct quotes, but rather expressions they typically used, drawn from my memory. They are depictions of their most repeated phrases, ideas, and conceptual positions, rather than actual quotes that should be – or can be – referenced.

The historical information for this section of the study has largely been extracted from the surviving New Age magazine, *Shalam Light*, which they produced; the purpose of which was to inform and motivate Australians interested in the latest developments in the *Cosmic Plan for Earth*, as channelled from the higher realms by New Age *sensitives* – people *used as instruments* who professed extra-sensory-perception, or the intuitive knowledge of *Spiritual Science*. The Robinsons’ other initiatives, such as their attempt at unifying the *Centres of Light* in Perth, while tangential to my research, were central to their mission of manifesting genuine *Universal Brotherhood*. This theme was to be played out in the later Universal Brotherhood Incorporated (UBI) and remains an ongoing theme amongst unaligned New Age teachers today: an *essential Oneness*, often referred to as *unity in diversity*, a phrase already in use by the Robinsons when I met them in 1971.

While their activities provided a forum for the promulgation of the *truths coming through various groups* with which they were philosophically aligned, their life at Shalam (the property) and their lived experience were also reported in *Shalam Light*. This provided a public platform from which to launch a schema of synthesised ‘*truths*’, many of which had already been taught by Fred, along with *new understandings* that were coming to Mary via her own *higher faculties*, mainly in the form of her self-interpreted dreams.

*Shalam Light*'s mix of the Robinsons *down-to-earth* tips related to experiences in the realms of organic gardening, home economics and diet (the physical) and their community initiatives such as the development of a New Age Council (the social), were supplemented, or more correctly underpinned, by their up-in-the-clouds *revealed knowledge* (the spiritual). The latter was typically *channelled through sensitives* who were said to be *in touch with various Ascended Masters, Elder Brothers or Space People* who, the Robinsons believed, were revealing *The Cosmic Plan for this Planet as it made its Transition into The Aquarian Dispensation or New Age*. This positioning makes these publications ground-breaking in Australia, supporting the view that the Robinsons were major contributors to the spread of the New Age concepts in Australia during the period they ran Shalam (1963–1975).

I will, in keeping with the style of this research, quote the original texts to tell the story of Shalam, while also relating some of the story of the later Universal Brotherhood Community. This is not a definitive history, but focuses on historical data that depict the lifestyle and thinking of the era, and the events which led directly to the forming of the Universal Brotherhood as an NRM, and which affected its functioning, while also seeding the public consciousness for the later uptake of New Age, ‘back-to-the-land’, ‘organic’ and ‘sustainable’ ideas in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

## On Production Values and Archiving *Shalam Light*

Shalam publications were reproduced on a Gestetner stencil duplicator.<sup>212</sup> They were printed on foolscap paper, folded in half and stapled. Violet ink was mainly used, with occasional green runs with pink covers. The colour violet was seen as representing the ‘*Violet Purifying Flame*’ of Saint Germain.<sup>213</sup> The pink covers of the publications represented the vibration of love as seen by clairvoyants and proclaimed by New Age channels, mystics and spiritual scientists who intuited such knowledge about colour. Violet was the colour of preference for all the later Universal Brotherhood Inc. publications.

The Robinsons were extremely conscious about not wasting paper, using very narrow margins and employing both sides of every page (including the heavier weight pink covers). Naïve home drawn illustrations and basic design principles were applied. The challenge of setting out pages via the Gestetner technology, to correctly correlate the page numbers, was well mastered. In copying the quotes I have attempted to reproduce the original in spacing, font, most of the grammar, and their idiosyncratic *Proper-Nouning* of words, as well as the Capitalisation of phrases that seem to me, as a reader of today, to be completely unnecessary. I have at times tinkered with the rather odd and near-consistent use of the *Robinsonian* double-full-stop: ‘. . .’. The device seemed to be an ambivalent hybrid between a full stop, semi-colon, dash and ellipsis. Occasionally a triple or even a *quadro-full-stop* is used at the end of a particularly definite statement, to indicate an exclamation, rather than used as points of suspension or ellipses. Where I have produced a facsimile of the writing to include these, I have bolded these punctuation marks to distinguish them from my own use of the ellipsis to indicate that I have left out text. Very few spelling errors were detected in their writing, and I have

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<sup>212</sup> The Gestetner, is a stencil duplicator or mimeograph machine. It was a low-cost printing press that worked by forcing ink through a stencil onto paper. These stencil duplicators were for many decades used to print short-run office work, classroom materials, and church bulletins prior to the introduction of photocopying and cheap offset printing by the late 1960s (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mimeograph>, accessed 30.9.2010; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gestetner>, accessed 30.9.2010).

<sup>213</sup> *The Violet Flame* (also known as *The Violet Fire*) is said by its proponents to contain ‘a unique spiritual energy that can help you in all areas of your life ... The colour violet has long been associated with spirituality. Having the highest frequency in the spiritual spectrum ... The violet flame is a tool of self-transformation’ (<http://thevioletflame.tripod.com/>, accessed 30.9.2010).

usually corrected these. The Robinsons were thorough self-editors in most regards, and on most occasions. Fred typed the publications himself with his ‘one gammy finger’<sup>214</sup> on an old Remington typewriter in the little office overlooking the Shalam orchard.

Mary Robinson was acutely conscious of preserving her writings, whether they were letters to other Light Centres, tracts, back issues of *Shalam Light* or even her dream books (which were kept very private – and still are). She had kept copies of all their work at Shalam and stored all the original Gestetner stencils in the Community office in a steel cabinet, until 1986 when they were destroyed by a fire.

### **The Chinese Burn**

The year before I left, when Mary and I had fallen out and become involved in non-violent *intracultic warfare*, another member and I cleaned out the Community office and burnt the original Gestetner stencils, gauging them to be technically outdated (we were using photocopying by then), and ideologically well past their use-by-date. Along with stacks of Universal Brotherhood tracts, multiple copies of the back issues of *Shalam Light* were incinerated in a forty-four gallon drum in full view of Mary’s administrative bedroom. She got wind of this provocative *Cultural Revolution* styled tract-burning, and was understandably, and to me then, deliciously furious.

While we did make an endeavour to keep a couple of copies of everything for her, I have no doubt that some texts were lost. Looking back, I am not proud of this unfriendly and painful *Chinese burn* inflicted on my old mentor. The least I could have done was to tell her what we were doing, but we were not on talking terms at that point.

The *karmic consequences* of my actions are that there are no copies of the first ten *Shalam Lights* in existence. I would now appreciate having access to those Gestetner original stencils which I probably burnt.

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<sup>214</sup> ‘My gammy finger’ was the way Fred referred to his deformed right hand index finger, going on to graphically explain ‘my blood was putrid with the foul smelling rotting flesh of gangrene – thanks to aluminium cooking utensils’ (Lectures, 1970s), which he believed caused his blood to be poisoned.

## Part 1: 'Our Shalam Story'

A special edition of *Shalam Light* (1.1.1964) was produced six months after Fred and Mary moved into Shalam together. The edition fits between their Number 11 edition (13.12.1963, the first of the extant editions) and Number 12 edition (13.1.1964). Fred wrote the one page foreword for this issue on the back of the pink cover, in which he makes comments that reveal his attitudes to the press, semantics and *hu-man thinking*, before introducing 'Our Shalam Story' written by Mary Broun. Fred's Introduction and Mary's story were designed to flesh out the *raison d'être* of Shalam. Perhaps their insistence on the name *Universal Brotherhood* was understandable, considering the enigmatic and bewildering panoply of propositions put forward as *self-evident TRUTHS*.

*In spite of modern scientific methods of communication a great confusion of thought prevails in our modern world, largely due to two main factors –*

*(1) The prevailing "journalistic sense", concerned with news value rather than an accurate pen & word picture, which is factual.*

*(2) The human weakness – due to immature hu-man minds – of the misinterpretation of the words used to convey meaning, from one mind to another....Those words are twisted, sifted & re-assorted to fit the preconceived ideas of the mind of those receiving the message (Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, January 1964, inside cover).*

Fred's thoughts regarding communication theory were often repeated during his public teaching address to my generation during the 1970s. The Robinsons often spoke of the inability of others to appreciate their thinking as *a vibrational issue*. Being *in tune with the vibrations of the New Age* made understanding possible. Later, during the Community days of the 1970s and '80s, *being of different vibration* meant that people were *out of the consciousness*, and no amount of explanation could help a person comprehend, or 'tune into the consciousnesses' as we used to say.

*Because of the foregoing & and associated factors only those of our friends who are in tune with our own "wavelength", either clairvoyantly, intuitively, or other avenues of extra-sensory perception have really known what has been happening since we came to "SHALAM" six months ago & what our real aim, objective and motive is (ibid.).*

Fred had already been well-prepared for being unfathomable during his years with Ione and Parcae Long, when he was setting gymnosophical *patterns on the ethers* for the *Aquarian New Agers*. Now he was doing it again, only now he had other patterns to set:

some *Oahspean*, some *Urantian*, and some still in evolution through Mary's connection with the *Ascended Masters'* channels.

In this early *Shalam Light* foreword Fred refers to some friends in the Eastern States and abroad who wanted to know 'what we hoped to achieve & our methods to attain the objective'. With the initial 'practical foundations laid' an 'opportunity ... to clarify the position so far as we are able' presented itself; and so during the Christmas and New Year break Mary 'received an impulse to take up her pen' to share the 'sequence of events which led up to what appeared to be such drastic changes in her accepted "Way of Life"' (Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, January 1964, inside cover). In the final paragraph Fred uses Mary as an example of his teachings in practice, in much the same way as he spoke about me at Carranya and then the Universal Brotherhood Community in the 1970s – as the praxis of his philosophy; the fulfilment of his ideal in the lived experience of those other than himself. Mary thus becomes the embodied precursor to the *Shalam prototype* (as Fred later called it), or *small scale working model* (as Mary called it) – both a prelude to the establishment of the Universal Brotherhood Community – *the larger scale working model*:

*After 6 months of practical experience in taking control of re-moulding her environment, she is now in a position to express an opinion as to the relative merits of the New and the old. The Natural v. the Artificial – God's "Way" v. Man's "Way" .... We send you this message of Hope and Joy for the new Year in the hope that it will inspire you to pursue your investigations into which is THE PRACTICAL "WAY" to produce the results you NEED and WANT.*

*In His Service,*

*Fred Robinson* (in *Shalam Light*, January 1964, p. 2).

While Fred never liked to think of himself as an in-your-face-proselytising-prophet, he simply could not help himself. I sometimes see a resonance with the intensity of focus associated with what is now known as Asperger Syndrome.<sup>215</sup> Fred's complete lack of awareness or understanding of the concept of social space was another quirk. Given the opportunity, he used to stand exceptionally close to his communicants, and eyeball them with intensity. A student of *proxemics* would have found a fascinating subject in Fred

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<sup>215</sup> Asperger syndrome (AS) is one of the autism spectrum disorders (ASD) ... that are characterised by abnormalities of social interaction and communication that pervade an individual's functioning ... People with Asperger syndrome often display behaviour, interests, and activities that are restricted and repetitive and are sometimes abnormally intense or focused ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asperger\\_syndrome#Social\\_interaction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asperger_syndrome#Social_interaction), accessed 30.9.2010).



Robinson.<sup>216</sup> With no concept of political or social diplomacy Fred was the very opposite of Mary, who disliked having her private space invaded.<sup>217</sup> Mary was acutely aware of the social climate, being a politically savvy strategist in her communicative acts. Mary firmly believed she was able to employ her spiritual intuition or guidance, gained via her dream life, to affect outcomes for the Shalam enterprise and for those she contacted. *What's right for one is right for all* was the aphorism she employed. While Fred and Mary were very different in personality, they worked as an effective and cohesive team for most of the twenty years they were together.

### **On the 'Twin Flame' Team**

By seeing themselves as *Twin Souls*, *Twin Flames* or *Soul Mates* – subtle distinctions which only they really understood – Fred and Mary Robinson worked well together; however, they appealed to quite different audiences, and so, to a greater or lesser degree, confused almost everyone. Usually either ahead of their time or behind it, even in the ascendancy phase of the Community one of them would be out of sync with almost everyone else. Fred was totally incompatible with mainstream culture, having been a 'hippie' since the early 1930s, while Mary Broun was out of sync with 'hippies' full stop. A socially-conforming country housewife and church-goer all her life, the marginal, revolutionary counterculturalists of the 1960s and '70s were anathema to her. Mary's contrary streak was not visible in either her appearance or her mode of life – until meeting Fred Robinson.

While they complemented each other personally, they were socially a mismatch. 'How did a straightforward woman like Mary get mixed up with a cosmic ratbag like Fred?' I recall one particularly straight visitor saying to me. 'How did such a great old hippie like Fred get mixed up with a control freak like Mary?' asked another dreadlocked Seeker.

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<sup>216</sup> Proxemics is the study of the cultural, behavioural, and sociological aspects of spatial distances between individuals (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/proxemics>, accessed 30.9.2010).

<sup>217</sup> At the time I met Mary, I had developed the annoying habit of touching people's noses to make a point of my affection for them – and I was getting away with it. Mary soon put me straight on this: 'Stop touching my nose Stephen, it is a silly invasive habit that you must break immediately'. Taken aback, I saw she was right and never did it again. This is a good example of Mary's straightforwardness'.

Briefly, around 1972–1975, they were a viable and appealing teaching team. For a moment they were in tune with the social mood – although this was so only because the movement begun by Fred alone on his trip to Cairns, and later supported by his publicists and organisers (initially me and my cousin Rosemary and a couple of others) controlled the meetings. We orchestrated the spin for these ‘twin souls’, introducing them to an eager New Age generation. We depicted Fred as ‘being more on the *love vibration*’. Mary was explained as being complementary, but harder to appreciate initially, ‘being more on the *power-vibration*’. Fred did the cosmic teachings and prophesied, while Mary organised and provided life-tests for the *soul growth* of any volunteer coming into the Community. The term ‘soul-polishing’ is attributed to Mary, who was the one who disciplined the later UBI Community.<sup>218</sup> Fred tended to be more popular with my generation, while Mary often made more sense to my parents’ age group. Put together, they worked as successfully against one another in the public domain, as they worked effectively in the private domain. An examination of their productive years at Shalam prior to the start of the Community shows their capacity to collaborate; while their working against each other is also documented; see for instance the way some ex-members of the UBI remember them in the *Compass* documentary ‘The Brotherhood’ (Critchley 2009).

### **Mary Broun’s Text ‘Our Shalam Story’**

This story, dated New Year’s Day 1964, covers the birth of Shalam. It begins by recounting the circumstances of Mary meeting Fred ‘*at a House-Party*’ in Mary’s home at Carlisle: ‘*it was actually a Birthday party for one of my “Bridge to Freedom” friends*’ (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, January 1964, p. 1). Mary points out that ‘*while it was a gay occasion, there was also a spiritual atmosphere pervading*’. We learn that Fred had only been in the West a few days and ‘*was not happy with the food where he was staying, and he was looking for a room*’ (ibid.).

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<sup>218</sup> This term ‘soul-polishing’ was actually Fred’s, and it came from the ROTA days when Parcae and Ione Long were engaging him in his own ‘soul-polishing’. He would voluntarily *squeal on the diamond wheel* on which he voluntarily placed his soul for ‘polishing’. The term was taken up by Mary during her time at Ogamisama’s Temple of Peace in Hon-bu, Japan.

Mary's family, 'keenly interested in the "Message" Fred brought' arranged that 'Fred should stay with us for a week or two until it was decided what he should do'. No mention is made here that there was 'no man in the house', as explained in her biography written almost twenty years later. I always had the feeling that being with Fred so quickly, and while she was still married, was a difficult issue for Mary, especially later, when unmarried couples who arrived wanted to live together in the Community – against the rule which she had created. In any case, it was during this time in close proximity to Fred that a 'link' was established between them:

*It was during those first few days that it began to dawn on us that we had been brought together for a purpose. Ideas and theories that I had believed to be my own; that I believed had originated in my own mind were being expounded by Fred. To me this was uncanny, & had to be investigated (Broun, in Shalam Light, January 1964, p. 1).*

Perhaps this is also a definition of love between two ardent spiritual seekers.

*It was very encouraging to have someone like this come along & confirm my beliefs in such a positive way. Of course I realise now that the greater part of our thinking is not our own thoughts at all. The theories I held were inspirations & if I could be inspired with an idea so could Fred be inspired with the same idea. Fred and I were sufficiently on the same wavelength, with the same tendencies & desire to make our relationship a very harmonious unity.*

*Gradually we began to work as a team or rather a duality, each complementing the other. Looking back I realise I had been well prepared for this work, with spiritual dreams, books etc (Broun, in Shalam Light, January 1964, pp. 1–2).*

Mary goes on to mention that she 'had finished Brother Philip's *Secret of the Andes* [1961] the day before meeting Fred' (ibid.), mentioning it as a book she would 'recommended to anyone who wants to know why we are at "SHALAM"'.<sup>219</sup> Mary's feeling that she had *been spiritually prepared to work with Fred*, imbued their lives together with a

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<sup>219</sup> The following is an excerpt from a present day New Age web site, purporting to explain 'The Great White Brotherhood and the Serpent Masters from Venus':

In recent times proof of the existence of the Monastery of the Seven Rays has come from a small group who travelled to the monastery in the 1960s. George Hunt Williamson (Brother Philip), author of *Secret of the Andes* (1962), later interviewed the members of this party to write his book about the abbey. One women of the group, Sister Thedra, spent five years at the abbey undergoing intensive spiritual training and initiations. She had been sent there by *Jesus Christ* who had physically appeared to her and spontaneously cured her of cancer. He introduced himself to her by his true, esoteric name 'Sananda Kumara', thereby revealing his affiliation with the Venusian founders of the Great White and Solar Brotherhoods ([http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/sumer\\_anunnaki/reptiles/reptiles21.htm](http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/sumer_anunnaki/reptiles/reptiles21.htm), accessed 1.10.2010).

sense of destiny. Much later in life, in her reflective writing (explored in the previous chapter), when things were difficult with Fred, she would see him as a replacement-partner able to help in building the Church which Clem Broun had first envisioned during his enigmatic and ambivalent spiritual experience soon after they had been married. It is quite likely that this story was a partial rationalisation of her coming together with Fred. Certainly Clem never spoke to their children about the establishing of a Church with their mother.<sup>220</sup>

### **On Publicity and the Early Initiatives**

Mary reveals the extent of their early initiatives and the extensive local publicity given Fred as a result of Mary's organisational skills and networking.

*We started with a few study classes around Perth. I organised & Fred expounded. I have a little car; so we were able to get around & we feel that there are not many people around Perth who have not heard of our project, mainly due to Radio Talks and Television Interviews (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, January 1964, p. 2).<sup>221</sup>*

Fred was not very good at any form of organising – especially of his own talks. Mary in effect became his publicity agent in Perth. Finding those who were on the same *vibrational wavelength* was always the purpose of the Robinson's publicity. God needed more labourers in the vineyard. Fred had always been a *recruiting sergeant* – a term he used for himself:

*The purpose of the publicity was an endeavour to contact those people who were ready and able to join us in our endeavour to practicalise the Spiritual Instruction now being broadcast to our Planet (ibid.).*

Mary's text clearly shares Fred's message with their readership. His essential message never changed, and Mary's advocacy of this message never really faltered either, although aspects of his message were later amended by her. Vegetarianism was sacrificed, and specific dates for the 'end of the world' were dropped. However, the following features or 'substance' remained essential to Mary's understanding for the rest of her life:

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<sup>220</sup> While I have no doubt that Clem did have this experience and shared it with Mary, neither of their two surviving sons remembers their father speaking about the establishment of this Church (Noel Broun & Graham Broun, pers. comms., 16.4.2010).

<sup>221</sup> Almost all of this public domain electronic media data has been lost, while only a relative few newspaper articles have been found.

*The substance of Fred's message was & still is, that our Planet Earth is being purified, from a Cosmic level, & is being raised into a higher vibration, and that it is necessary for the individual to purify himself physically, mentally and spiritually if we wish to stay with the Planet. That all Peoples, governments, systems, etc. functioning below a certain level of vibration or GOD CONSCIOUSNESS, would, very shortly, be removed to an environment more suited to their present stage of development (Broun, in Shalam Light, January 1964, p. 2).*

It is little wonder so few people enlisted in the Robinson's endeavour during the 1960s. Unless a *seeker* had followed the stream of Spiritualist, Theosophical or the I AM Movement's thinking, and had *absorbed* other inspired channelled revelations regarding *The Cosmic Plan for this Planet*, such as *The Secret of the Andes* (1961), and the *Oahspe Bible* (1883) or the *Urantia Book* (1955), then the Robinsons' propositions were simply way-out. The Robinsons' ideas and their proposed spiritual/social experiment were among the many revolutionary and countercultural ideas of the time. Certainly the Australian press saw it this way:

### **Utopia in W.A. Village**

A group of Perth people is planning to set up a Shangri-La on the Albany Highway, 24 miles from the city.

In the next few months they hope to begin a 20 family village in the State's first experiment in communal living. The village will aim at being self-supporting, raising fruit crops without artificial fertilisers.

Internal transactions will be conducted under a primitive barter system. Money will be used only in transactions with the outside world.

One of the organisers of the project, Mrs. Mary Broun, of Carlisle, said yesterday a site had been selected at Bedforddale, six miles south of Armadale.

The 70-acre property would cost £9,000. The organisers had about £3,000.

She said life would be based on the principles of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man and reverence for all life [Fred and Mary would have been disappointed about the dearth of capitalisations in this sentence]. All property would be communally-owned, and, after the initial buildings were established, people would be able to live there without making a capital outlay.

Meat, alcohol and tobacco would be banned. The organisers hoped to set up a natural healing clinic as the project developed.

Members of the commune would grind their own wheat – bought under a barter system from farmers – and prepare most of their own food

*(The West Australian, 18.4.1963, p. 1).*

The absence of Fred Robinson's name in this text is worth noting. The outstanding £6,000 was not forthcoming. The village did not go ahead. Undeterred, the Robinsons moved forward with their project on their own. The following excerpt reveals a New Age revolution which was as 'out there' as any of the drug-induced imaginings of any 'hippie'. Perhaps this *off-the-planetness* was part of the appeal for my generation. Our

parents' generation was clearly unready to leave the cities and start communities, as Fred's *Cultural Revolution* styled message exhorted. Phrases such as 'the time for patching up old garments is past and we must get out & start afresh' (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, January 1964, p. 2) made sense to my generation, but were seen as outrageous within the mainstream. It was a mammoth task; but the Robinsons were among the very few of the older generation prepared to put the New Age of Aquarius into practice in Australia:

*... to demonstrate a "New Way of Life" which, in its fundamentals, is as old as the original "Garden of Eden" and to put into a working model the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth & prove, by the results, that His teachings are intensely practical – not as the world gets results, enforced with guns and poison, but with love to our neighbour and co-operation with the Nature Forces ... self-supporting and able to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – but with the same spirit of Godliness as of old (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, January 1964, p. 2).*

Mary cites Fred's message about *doing it for the children*, as the key motivating factor in their taking action, something I was to copy as one of my generation's first committed alignees:

*Fred's message about the children gave our work the impetus for action. In his belief no retrograde soul has been permitted to re-embody onto this planet since 1959, & High Souls are now arriving to prepare the Way for the Millennium & return of Jesus. As the old world begins to crumble, to give way to the new, these souls will need Light and Love & a Place of Refuge – So this brought us to the idea of establishing a New Age Village. We located the perfect spot. However the purchase price was more than I could manage alone and no one else was ready with money to join us at that time. So then we decided on a smaller working model, one that we could afford, & that is what brought us to "SHALAM" (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, January 1964, pp. 2–3).*

This focus on the children, and the name 'Shalam', both reveal that *Oahspe's* 'anti-script' was foundational to *The Work* of establishing a place of refuge for the *High Souls* who would soon inhabit the New Age Village they hoped to establish.

### **On First Arriving at Shalam**

Mary describes the arrival week and the property they purchased as their *small scale working model*. Interestingly, Mary saw that it was important to flesh out for her readers the geographical surroundings of their 'model', as well as the philosophical positions that underpinned it. This was perhaps one of the most important complementary skills Mary bought to the working relationship, for Fred found it extraordinarily difficult to

focus on the details of the physical world around him, ignoring all but *the world wide economic conspiracy* that had *kept mankind in the dark about the Cosmic Truths*.

Mary's detailed description is valuable in that it confirms her ability to focus on the details of the physical world of the everyday. It is the everyday description sitting within this otherwise culturally confronting text which is so significant. The ability to integrate the practical 'outworking' (Mary's favoured word relating to praxis), and to normalise and balance her communication of their all-important spiritual message, made at least aspects of their joint schema much more attractive than Fred's bold and bald rhetoric. In Mary, Fred had found a practical partner who could translate his prophetic and *catalytic* enterprise into a language that was less strident and more positive than his own. Fred also recognised that Mary was less likely to be seen as a crank and a ratbag – something that had always dogged him. He was prepared to downplay his gymnosophical past and to wear a suit and tie if it would help get across his informing, transforming but always eccentric *Truths*. Mary's succinct description of their activities of their first week at Shalam finishes with the sowing of seed and the establishment of a compost heap – emblems of sustainability both then and now:

*We arrived here on the 13<sup>th</sup> June 1963 & by the 23<sup>rd</sup>, we held our Opening Day. Those ten days were the busiest of my life. In that time we shifted the contents of my Carlisle home to "SHALAM", put most things where I could find them, did a little painting and varnishing, sowed some wheat seed and Fred started the first compost heap (Broun, in Shalam Light, January 1964, p. 3).*

### **On Geographic and Social Placing**

In the following text the geographic location of the property is precise and able to be imagined. Being on the 'crest' of the road and having a 'panorama' reinforces the ethos of the property. Like the churches of Europe, the Robinsons were symbolically living on *higher-ground* (a trope much favoured by Mary Robinson):

*"SHALAM" is situated 19 miles south of Perth & is on the first Rise of the Darling Ranges. Armadale is the junction of two highways; the Albany and the South West Highway. At the junction itself is the old Narrogin Inn, which is a landmark of the old pioneering days. One Mile south of the Inn is the bitumen road joining the two highways and this is the Bedforddale Hill Road, & Shalam is on the crest of this road (Broun, in Shalam Light, January 1964 p. 3).*

I suspect Mary was aware of the meaning behind her topographical descriptions here. The capitalisation of the word ‘*Rise*’ denotes the importance she placed on height. The symbology of being ‘*at the junction of two highways*’ and at ‘*the crest*’ of the connection between them, with a ‘*pioneering days*’ landmark on the fork, directly beneath their property, would not have been lost on her, even though she was savvy enough not to overtly point to the allusion. Another reason for being at a higher altitude was that of flooding. While the word ‘tsunami’ was not specifically mentioned, Biblical-style flooding was a regular theme of the cataclysmic channelling about the changes to come. Buying land by the sea was a definite no-no. Not only were they well away from the sea, but they had a great view:

*Our little 5 acre property has a bitumen drive, which runs up a steep rise to the garage, on the far side of the house, about 4 chains from the road. The property is long and narrow and continues up a gradual slope to the top of the hill, at the far end of the property, from which a delightful panorama is viewed. This is where we take all of our visitors. On a clear day the ocean can be seen quite clearly, as well as Garden Island beyond. The little township of Armadale nestles at the foot of SHALAM (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, January 1964, p. 3).*

The relationship between Armadale, their local ‘little township’, and Shalam is unconsciously explicated by the trope ‘nestles at the foot’, a term which also reveals how the world surrounding them was seen in terms of their paternal service-centred self-image – a perspective not much different from the Colonial project of missionaries, which formed their style of thinking. Whether they were conscious of it or not, the Robinsons were products of colonial thinking, and this infused their own *Cosmicolonial* project. It is useful to read the Robinsons’ rhetoric through the theoretical lens of Postcolonialism.<sup>222</sup>

The Robinsons certainly saw themselves as the spiritual servants of the *hu-mans* in the district; in so doing they positioned themselves as subtly superior. They believed they had the inside information on both the *conspiracy which enslaved humanity*, and

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<sup>222</sup> The field of Postcolonial Studies gained prominence from the 1970s. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) is seen by some as a marker of the rise of postcolonialism in the Western academy. The growing currency within the academy of the term ‘postcolonial’ was consolidated by the appearance of *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (1989) (<http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Intro.html>, accessed 20 4.2010). A number of Australian books, such as Graham Jenkins’ *Conquest of the Ngarrindjeri* (1979) which looked at the effect of colonialism on Indigenous Australians, makes points about colonial thinking that can also be addressed to the way the Robinsons thought about *hu-mans*.



the supposed *cosmic changes about to have an effect on everyone* – including their neighbours.<sup>223</sup> The neighbours on the other hand saw the Robinsons as delightful eccentric mystics, but not to be taken too seriously. In a curious way both the Robinsons and their neighbours were charitable towards each other, yet each believing the other to be at least mildly insane.<sup>224</sup> Fred and Mary were not in their own minds superior. They simply, and almost matter-of-factly, recognised that *most people in the world were not yet vibrationally evolved from a karmic perspective*; but they believed that the next generation, ‘from 1959’, would be able to understand, if they were *protected from the negative forces and given the opportunity to be their Higher-Selves* – initially by hearing the *simple truths which were their birthright*. The providing of a *pure environment, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually*, for my generation and our children who would be *yet higher souls*, was always to be the key purpose of Shalam. The position aligned with the *Oashspe: A Kosmon Bible’s* penultimate chapter ‘The Book of Jehovih’s Kingdom on Earth’ (1960, p. 805), which includes the (irreal) history of Shalam, titled ‘The Book of Shalam’ (ibid., p. 809).

The idea that the Shalam/Carranya Communities and the later Universal Brotherhood Community were a kind of finishing school or New Age College, where we were being prepared for a destiny that involved *impersonal, selfless, loving service, for the benefit of the whole planet*, was hard to avoid. Such attitudes, with the best of intentions, heralded the beginning of a religious mindset that in the eyes of the observing culture pointed to the formation of an exclusive ‘cult’.

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<sup>223</sup> Fred liked to depict our world ‘Urantia’ as ‘the lunatic asylum for the rest of the universe’, quoting George Bernard Shaw who indeed said the following: ‘Earth is an insane asylum, to which the other planets deport their lunatics’ ([http://www.cancertutor.com/Quotes/Quotes\\_Insanity.html](http://www.cancertutor.com/Quotes/Quotes_Insanity.html), accessed 12.2.2011). To Fred, the cure for this planets ‘madness’ was in the adoption of *the cosmic point of view by the mass consciousness*; but they couldn’t see this because they were still unevolved *hu-mans* constricted by a lack of *the needed Aquarian, New Age, higher-spiritual-faculties*, which Fred believed would be *natural to the next generation*. For these reasons the neighbours were treated kindly, but were somewhat indulged.

<sup>224</sup> In 2006 I interviewed a number of the Robinsons’ neighbours from the 1960s to gain their perspective. Thanks to the detective work of an Armadale City Council officer, eight neighbours gathered for this ‘research-picnic’ at Shalam. The then owners offered to host the occasion. It became clear that Fred and Mary had largely kept to themselves, their stream of visitors came specifically to engage with *The New Age Work*. The Robinsons were nonetheless viewed as ‘good neighbours’ (a phrase, which in Australia usually means something like ‘helpful when necessary, otherwise undemanding’). They were also seen as ‘way out’ and ‘extraordinarily eccentric’. The research revealed that the Robinsons were without local neighbourhood enemies – a remarkable achievement in its own right.

## On Shalam House

Mary's utilitarian description of the main house and porch area continues to engage the ordinary. Everyone finds commonality in descriptions of real estate and living space – even the specific layout and dimension of rooms (something Fred would never have noticed):

*The house is of blue painted weatherboards with a tiled roof & is in good condition. The Front door leads into an Entrance Hall 15' x 8' & this opens into the Main Central room which is 27' x 15' & is fully carpeted. Around this main room in a sort of pagoda style are all the other rooms – three Bedrooms, Dining Room, Kitchen & Bathroom. Out to the back is a porch which leads to a laundry, toilet etc. The porch is covered with two Passion Vines, a summer and winter, so it looks as if we might have ripe Passion Fruit all year around.*

*One of the Bedrooms which leads off the Entrance Hall to the left, is covered with pink mottled Feltex, and this we keep as guest room.<sup>225</sup> All these surrounding rooms have much window space – almost like Sun rooms. They are light, well ventilated & all have beautiful views (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, January 1964, p. 3).*

It is interesting that Mary has left out the all-important dream concerning the main pink room – a dream which she had just prior to finding the house, and which she claimed was just as she had dreamt. Perhaps these more mystical elements were seen as something not to be written about at the time. Later this dream became part of the folklore around Shalam.

Arriving at Shalam in December 1971, as part of Fred's Eastern States Aquarian entourage, I expected Mary to be the *Earth-Mother* complement of Fred's *Cosmic Father*. When I and others saw plastic flowers in the crystal vases, we took it upon ourselves to replace them with a variety of long grasses which were just beginning to seed. Mary stuck up for her plastic flowers and her 1950s taste ... and we had to put up with them for the rest of our 'natural' Community lives. Mary's penchant for plastic furniture, swirling purple floral carpets and paisley nylon soft-furnishings was particularly difficult for the more artistic Members to handle. This clash of 'tastes' was to become part of the soul-polishing; sometimes causing the most challenging confrontations – for taste is not an ethical issue easy to judge. While trying to collaborate, Mary was too often insistent on colour schemes and soft furnishings that

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<sup>225</sup> I remember this *Feltex* room all too well. Mary's taste in décor was a sticking point with many of the baby-boomer Community Members of the 1970s and '80s. For many this was a cross they had to bear.

some Members found difficult to live with. On one occasion the painting of rustic brickwork almost caused an insurrection. Fred's *bad prophecy* was somehow more acceptable than Mary's *bad taste*.

### **On the State of the Garden**

The Shalam texts contain a definite, although almost surely unconscious, allusion to the *Shangri-la* styled monastery described in Williamson's *Secret of the Andes* (1962), which had so influenced the Robinsons' decision to form Shalam. The depiction of the garden certainly describes the organic utopia which we young idealists were looking for in the 1970s. As relative self-sufficiency in food was a vital aspect of the 'model' they were creating, it is not surprising that Mary detailed the all important nature of the soil and the types of fruits and vegetables they were growing:

*On the right & bordering the drive, as you enter SHALAM, is the Citrus orchard – about 40 trees, well established, tho' not old – mostly Oranges, but a few Grape-fruit, Mandarin & Lemon. On the left of the drive is the balance of the Orchard – Peach, Apricot, Plum, Almond, Apple, Pear, Loquat, Fig & 2 dozen Grape Vines. Around the house are clumps of Bananas which adds an attractive tropical appearance to the scene. A few bunches of Bananas are trying to ripen.*

*When we arrived there were potatoes, tomatoes, capsicum, chilli, beet, mint & nasturtium. The latter grow profusely everywhere. We have now added spinach, silver beet, wheatgrass, potatoes, more tomatoes, beans, peas, lettuce, herbs & a few cabbages. There are about 120 trees and vines in the established orchard & we have planted about twenty more young trees. So we can truly say that, by our own desire and effort, we are now "Living under our own Vine & Fig Tree and none shall make them afraid (Micah 4 v. 4)" (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, January 1964, pp. 3–4).*

The mention of 'wheatgrass' which the Robinsons' grew under shady trees near the house predates the mainstream commercial development by almost forty years.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> 'The History of Wheatgrass' (Fowlkes 1999) observes that wheat grass featured in Edmund Bordeaux Szekely's 'translations' *The Essene Gospel of Peace* (1937): 'The main teaching of Essene Book I is: Don't kill your food by cooking it. The main teaching of Essene Book IV is: all grasses are good for man and wheatgrass is the perfect food for man' (<http://www.naturalhealthweb.com/articles/fowlkes1.html>, accessed 10.9.2011). The Robinsons had read and *absorbed* Szekely's 'Biogenetic' Essene Gospels. They also championed Anne Wigmore's books about wheatgrass and sprouted grains, such as *Why Suffer, The Answer? Wheatgrass God's Mana!* (1964), and later, *Be Your own Doctor* (1969). Raw-food, wheatgrass and sprouts were points of synchronism with the baby-boomer generation's 'you-are-what-you-eat' philosophy, and with its penchant for innovative/ancient *superfoods* which encourage optimum health and the avoidance of mainstream medical practitioners.

Fred and Mary Robinson can also be seen as forerunners of the Slow Food Movement.<sup>227</sup> Their obvious enjoyment of their own in-season produce, and their interest in the soil, and the description of their first picking of fruit, are redolent of the good life of the Garden of Eden (before the fall but with clothing). Since the following text is written in the present tense, the experiential nature of their obvious enjoyment of their life is infectious:

*The soil is a rich red loam, & full of big fat worms; coming in the middle of a cold wet winter, the garden has been rather slow, but now the warm weather is here we have grown good crops of potatoes, tomatoes and greens. The tree ripened fruits are delicious. The Apricots ripened first & no sooner did we catch the last Apricot than the first Peach arrived.*

*Just at the moment of typing we try our first Plum as the last peach is harvested. Delicious late Oranges are still coming in & I've never seen such large Figs as those we are now starting to pick – All tree ripened & no chemicals or sprays used on them. It is indeed very satisfying (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, January 1964, p. 4).*

### **On Water Sustainability at Shalam**

It is surprising that the source of their water supply is not mentioned in this text. A supply of pure water was a major platform of Fred's teachings about self-sufficiency. They had no doubt made mention of their water supply in some of the previous ten lost issues of *Shalam Light*, as they were particularly proud of their water-flow generated Jack Pump, which worked on the principle of displacement, somewhat like a bicycle pump. It was situated down the valley in a spring-fed surveyed creek that ran through the neighbour's property across the road about 250 meters away. This simple sustainable mechanical device pumped water up to a concrete header tank (in 1971 this was a twenty-thousand gallon tank which doubled as a swimming pool) and was about a hundred meters up the hill. The pressure from this was sufficient to run sprinklers in the garden below, and to irrigate the orchard. The whole system thus worked on the free hydro-energy provided by the spring-fed creek and the pressure of the stored water.

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<sup>227</sup> *Slow Food* is an international movement founded by Carlo Petrini in 1986. Promoted as an alternative to fast food, it strives to preserve traditional and regional cuisine and encourages farming of plants, seeds, and livestock characteristic of the local ecosystem. It was the first established part of the broader *Slow movement*. The movement has since expanded globally to over 100,000 members in 132 countries. Its goals of sustainable foods and promotion of local small businesses are paralleled by a political agenda directed against globalisation of agricultural products ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slow\\_Food](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slow_Food), accessed 13.12.2010).

This is the sort of sustainable system that organic farmers of today dream about – but which global-warming-induced droughts and dried up springs have made difficult to replicate.

### On Shalam's Opening Day

Mary recalls 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1963, the opening day of Shalam, as being ‘*one of the few sunny days of a very wet winter*’ (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, January 1964, p. 4). Sixty guests attended ‘*to wish us well and give their blessing*’. Swami Kuranananda, a teacher of the Divine Life Society, ‘*spoke to the children (old and young) then blessed our new Sanctuary*’ (ibid.).<sup>228</sup> By way of a testimony to the divine and peaceful ambience of the property and *Centre of Light* they had established, Mary reports that ‘*He [Swami Kuranananda] and his mother were both impressed by the Spiritual atmosphere pervading SHALAM*’ (ibid.). This section is concluded with the sentence, ‘*Fred conducted the Service and then afternoon tea was served*’ (ibid.). It seems that the in-house ephemera relating to this day have been lost. However the *West Australian* reported the following:

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<sup>228</sup> Swami Karunananda was an Australian yoga teacher. When he visited Western Australia he stayed with Dr. Werther, a friend of the Robinsons, who had founded a branch of the Divine Life Society in Perth. In Swami Karunananda's final years he was looked after by four of his disciples near the Ashram of his own guru, Swami Chidananda (who was a disciple of Swami Sivananda, the founder of the *Divine Life Society*; Sivananda's guru was the revered holy man Sri Ramakrishna). A brother-monk of Sivananda's was Swami Vivekananda, the Swami credited with popularising Vedanta philosophy through his presentations at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago between the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 27<sup>th</sup> of September 1983: ‘And so meteoric was the transformation of the Swami from obscurity to fame, that it can truly be said that he “awoke one morning to find himself famous”’ (quoted from Ananyananda 1979, in LeBeau 1999). The spiritual lineage of one's Gurus is particularly important in the Indian yogic tradition. Evidently Karunananda became ‘an example of fortitude personified’ (LeBeau 1999, Chapter 8); he was paralysed ‘and yet he was always in bliss. If ants or insects crawled over him, he could not even remove them and he needed someone constantly with him’ (ibid.); he communicated by way of a board and with the assistance of his disciples produced articles and poems – including the following autobiographical poem about the position he found himself in:

I was an artist, a scribe, and He takes away my hands. I was a Yogasana enthusiast, demonstrator, and teacher, and He takes away my arms. I was a singer, a lecturer, and He takes away my voice. But oh! What does He give me? He gives me simplicity, the ability to weep as others laugh, and laugh as others weep ... (a reformatted excerpt, Swami Karunananda, in LeBeau, 1999).

Swami Karunananda ‘had many disappointments in the last years of his life; but he never worried because he knew Chidananda was there and he knew Chidananda would never forsake a friend’ (ibid.). Karunananda's guru Chittananda apparently took complete care of him and his disciples, performing the funeral rites in the Ganges for this Australian (information and quotations from Yvonne LeBeau's, *This Monk From India* 1989; Web Edition 1999, Chapter 8, <http://www.dlshq.org/download/monk.htm>, accessed 13.12.2010). I was to meet this silent and already ailing Swami in 1972, before he left Australia, and while he was staying in the renovated stables of the historic Adelaide Hills mansion, Manoah, then owned by a friend of Fred Robinson. I was trying to instigate a Community based on Fred's teachings, with Swami Kurananda as the *spiritual nucleus* – but the Swami's health was deteriorating and the *right people* were hard to find.

## Dedication of Sanctuary

Shalam a sanctuary established by a religious group on five acres of ground in Bedfordale Road Armadale, will be dedicated at a ceremony there at 2.30 p.m. on June 23<sup>rd</sup>. Housewife Mary Broun and religious philosopher Mr. Fred Robinson seek to establish a communal village where people can work and live together in harmony.

With another follower, Mr. Lewis Hancock, Mrs. Broun and Mr. Robinson have established themselves on the £5,000 property. They plan to run an orchard, vegetable garden and fowls and to hold spiritual meetings during weekends. They hope that followers will buy an adjoining property and help develop the communal village project

(*The West Australian*, 14.6.1963, p.7).

It is interesting to note that Fred is now described as a ‘religious philosopher’. The report is free from any angle designed to discredit their efforts. The presence of another man on the property gave some sense of propriety to a living situation that Mary would have been very self-conscious about. The article does not hide the fact that Fred and Mary were partners. Given Fred’s background, which Mary knew all about, she had taken quite a risk in taking up with Fred, she must have know his gymnosophical past could have been exposed in the press an any time. For this reason Mary does not fairly fit the definition of a ‘prude’ (as she was cast by UBI ex-members in the *Compass* programme). Although certainly no naturist, she was prepared to read, experiment, and even write about sexuality, a fact evidenced by a leaflet the two published about the sexual practice of Karezza, a practice brought to prominence by Alice Bunker Stockham.<sup>229</sup> Mary was open-minded about sexual practices within marriage, however her inherited Victorian morality created a tension when set against the breakdown of sexual values in the 1960s.

## On Local Friends and Guests

In ‘Our Story of Shalam’ (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, January 1964), mention is made of a few people who were particularly helpful to the Robinsons. Lew Hancock, living in his own caravan on the South-East side of the property, had been with them from the

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<sup>229</sup> Alice Bunker Stockham (1833–1912) an obstetrician and gynaecologist from Chicago coined the term Karezza (from the Italian for ‘caress’) and authored a book by this name in 1896. It refers to non-religious spiritual sexual practices that draw upon tantric techniques of body control but do not involve any of tantra’s cultural or iconographic symbolism. Stockham promoted Karezza as a means to achieve birth control, social and political equality for women, and marital pleasure and hence marital fidelity ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice\\_Bunker\\_Stockham](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice_Bunker_Stockham), accessed 13.12.2010).

beginning, but *'having broken an ankle, by January he was attempting a little gardening'* (ibid., p. 4).

There was clearly some meaningful engagement with the venture amongst Perth locals, however the support from these friends of Shalam dwindled relatively quickly once the younger generation started arriving in the 1970s, perhaps a relief to those who had been assisting during the early '60s. I do remember the bee-keeping couple who are acknowledged in the following note of gratitude, which provides a segue into a short lesson on the importance of bees and worms:

*To Peter & Clair our sincere thanks in sending us two hives of Bees & equipment. They are as essential, in their example & labour, as are the earthworms, in helping to bring about a balance in the cycle of fertility & nutrition* (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, January 1964, p. 9).

The German family who are thanked and appreciated below remained friends of the Robinsons and the Universal Brotherhood network well into the 1980s; at this Ravensthorpe property they hosted members who visited them for 'working holidays'.

*To Uta & Martin for the wonderful New Age spirit of Service they demonstrated when they came over 50 miles to help with the heavy work outside & Uta stayed a full 2 weeks giving joyous and highly efficient help in all activities. To this migrant family, from Germany, the brotherhood of man is not an idealistic theory – they LIVE it. Uta & Martin – a teen-age brother and sister – leave for Esperance this week to start on the pioneering work of clearing a track for the rest of the family on the Government block of land they drew in a ballot. " 'Tis not in mortals to command success but they'll do more – Deserve it". GOD bless them* (ibid.).<sup>230</sup>

People who came to serve in little ways were always appreciated by the Robinsons, and they really did make an effort not to take people for granted:

*To our dear friend Mary Llorens our deep appreciation of her indefatigable efforts with her paint brush & tins of paving paint which she used to such good effect in brightening up the cement steps & pavements around the house [in cherry red ed.]. Also for her gifts to The Sanctuary* (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, January 1964, p. 10).

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<sup>230</sup> This saying is adapted from Joseph Addison's *Cato* (Act I, Scene 2). The line spoken ends '...but we'll do more, Sempronius – We'll deserve it'. Fred Robinson employed many Stoic sentiments such as this. He was not really a Romantic Christian – success he believed should be deserved by one's deeds. Stoic grit was more important to Fred than either *Christian Salvation* (through an atonement theology), or *New Age Grace* (through sheer presumption).

## **On Visitors and Other *Light Centres***

The Robinsons' interstate and international correspondence list included most of the functioning New Age *Light Centres* in the world at that time; and these New Religious Movements often shared their copies of *Shalam Light* within their group, especially when it included their own reprinted teachings. The eclectic mix of the groups represented, many of which were involved in parochial disputations regarding *fitness to be the true channel* of this or that Ascended Master, turned *Shalam Light* into an internationally discussed New Age journal.

I took on the correspondence with many of these Light Centres for a period during the early 1970s, informing them of the development of the Universal Brotherhood; so I was in a position to know the *diversity of truths* expressed within *the essential unity* believed to exist. Occasional one-off tracts were sent out to this interstate and overseas mailing list after the *Shalam Light* Newsletters were discontinued in about 1973. When the Community was mushrooming so quickly we had our hands full coping with day-to-day emergencies. Living in the burgeoning Community made the time-consuming and thoughtful work of writing *about* the New Age less relevant than its praxis: actually living the *good, true and beautiful* alternative life – and coping with its manifold daily problems.

The following paragraph reveals the success the Robinsons experienced during the early days of the communicative spiritual network that was served by *Shalam Light*:

*To all our friends, between N.Q. and W.A. & overseas who have shown their appreciation & understanding of our efforts & motives by sending Love Offerings to assist the project along, & for their encouraging letters, we ask you to please accept this as an acknowledgment & an expression of our gratitude (Broun, in Shalam Light, January 1964, p.10 ).*

## **On Building the Shalam Community**

Initially there was only one extra caravan as spare accommodation, apart from the guest room. The early plans to rectify this shortage were addressed in this newsletter along with its reflective history and philosophical positioning:

*So now it comes time to consider the building. We have drawn up a plan – a 'U' shape – which will be located about 4 chains up the hill, above the house, in the very near future (Broun, in Shalam Light, January 1964, p. 10).*



It is hard not to detect shades of the ROTA styled *gunnadoism* in the rhetoric in the last phrase of this text. This pattern of positive hopefulness of what might happen *in the very near future* would continue through the life of the UBI Community.

*Our main requirement at the moment is for some voluntary building labour. We have £1,000 to draw on, at the moment, but if it is all taken up with labour costs, it will not go very far. We do not plan to complete the building just yet. Perhaps a flat & two self-contained rooms would be satisfactory, for present. So we are hoping for an Angel of Light, in the form of a builder to land, via Space Craft – or any other way, for that matter (ibid.).*

The attempt at humour in the last sentence, to soften the clearly serious request to their readership for voluntary assistance in a major building proposal, is remarkable in that it laughs at the likelihood of the proposition of the extraterrestrial help they are expecting in their literature. The ideas of such *close encountered* help from the Space People/Elder Brothers, even for those who believed it had been given before in the building of the Pyramids or Easter Island statues, is somehow always referred to with a smile – even by true believers like the Robinsons. Perhaps it is just too ‘off the planet’ and out of our lived experience to speak or write about such extraterrestrial help without joking. Any such suggestion during the Community years was always accompanied by mirth; and often led by the Robinsons, myself, or one of the Community ‘jesters’ (of which there were several). Rarely was this subject approached with intensity and cultic fervour, as implied in media stories about the Universal Brotherhood from the 1970s until the present.

### **On Community Living**

Following Mary’s plea for a *building angel*, she turns for the first time in this text to the subject of Community life generally, a topic close to Fred’s heart, and the focus of his activities since the mid-1930s; but one to which Mary was relatively new. While Mary deferred to Fred’s *truths* about a *Fraternity that followed the blueprint as laid down in Oahspe*, and took cognisance of his experience at ROTA and the Communities he had attempted to start (especially in regard to what not to do), she began having ideas of her own. An astute political activist, Mary had been turning her attention to some of the issues related to Community Living, ever since reading *The Secret of the Andes* (Williamson 1961) only a couple of years before writing this text.

Mary was already evolving a suite of principles that would guide her when thrust into the position of Nucleus and Principal of the Universal Brotherhood, less than a decade into her future – when a new generation of willing but inexperienced spiritual seekers invaded her home to start a Community. Mary’s musings here are instructive when played into the future:

*Yes, it seems that our little 5 acres will be capable of providing a model, to demonstrate the principle of Community Living. Some people interpret Community Living to mean we all live together, as one big happy family. This idea is far from the truth, as we understand and practise it. The best explanation of our form of Community Living is to be found in the old Egyptian proverb “keep your tents apart but draw your hearts together (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, January 1964, p. 10).<sup>231</sup>*

Mary was to repeat this proverb many times in the 1970s to explain how we lived in the UBI Community. Just how this maxim would be interpreted in practice was bound to be problematic, however Mary does go on to explain it in the context of the envisioned Community, defining what ‘freedom’ means, both practically and philosophically. The limitations of freedom were explored more fully in the Universal Brotherhood, in a range of in-house canon laws instigated by Mary and the CentreCore, and ratified by the Community as a whole.

*This means that while each person is free to co-operate in any avenue of work which they feel attracted to & harmonise with, nevertheless each person, or family unit must have their own private place of abode & perfect freedom to handle their own affairs in their own way.*

*No one would be permitted to come to SHALAM to live unless they had evolved to a point where they recognise The Fatherhood of GOD, the Brotherhood of Man & had reverence for All Life; but having reached this point they are then ready to order their own affairs, as OAH SPE says “First, Freedom unto all people on Earth, & to the angels of Heaven to think and speak whatever they will. Second: that since no man can acquire knowledge for another, but that each and all must acquire knowledge for themselves, THOU SHALT DISPOSE OF WHATEVER IS BEFORE THEE IN THINE OWN WAY’ (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, January 1964, p. 10).*

The unreferenced quotes are from *Oahspe*, ‘The Book of Discipline’, Chapter XIV verses 1–2 (1960, p. 843). The capitalisation is Mary’s and reveals how important it was

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<sup>231</sup> I was able to track this saying via a *Time* article on the Middle-East entitled ‘Peace of the Brave’, which concludes thus: ‘An old Arab saying is, “Keep your tents apart and bring your hearts together.” It is not an easy maxim to live up to’ (Reported by Kevin Fedarko; Sam Allis/Jerusalem, James Carney & Dean Fischer/Washington & Scott MacLeod/Paris, ‘Peace of the Brave’, *Time*, 9.10.1995) (<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,983530-3,00.html>, accessed 25.9.2008).

to her that people *order their own affairs and follow their own guidance*, a position she consistently took in the UBI Community, and one which is further outlined in the following:

*Our spiritual Philosophy is 'FREEDOM'. Freedom to seek, receive and apply Truths from any source, using only one's intuition & discrimination as a guide. The Heavens have opened & communication has been resumed between the human race, on this planet, & the Universe, as part of a unified Whole. TRUTH is pouring down through many channels (ibid.).*

The youthful idealists who came to Shalam in the early 1970s had so much innocent but inexperienced wild energy and enthusiasm, with so many 'inspirations' that someone had to take control of the project for its own sanity. Unfortunately for Mary, Fred was little help in organising that which he set in motion – he was intent on recruiting more people and thus compounding Mary's problems. The inexperienced early members like me and those who happened to arrive became Mary's helpers initially, and then the *governing council* of the Community – later dubbed the *CentreCore*. A number of those who came with strong personal ideals were not really interested in any kind of 'leadership model' – they simply wanted to do what they were 'inspired to do'. The idea of *discerning the truth as it poured through many channels* was to become a thankless task.

### **On Channelling Truth**

Some of the channels of the 1960s (just as today) were either psychologically unstable or had become the *conduits* for messages of high-weirdness, from a source difficult to imagine as being benevolent *Elder Brothers* (or Sisters) in the employ of God. Some were extraordinarily good at selling themselves, rhetorically spinning their *un/truths* at face-to-face encounters with prospective *seeker* → *followers*. The channelling scene was complicated further by the undeniable fact that much of the '*TRUTH pouring down through many channels*', to the unsuspecting and gullible New Age seekers of that day, was clearly contradictory. Mary worked through a range of perspectives in 'Our Shalam Story', trying to solve this conundrum and unpack issues surrounding the *Planetary Changes* the channels kept mentioning. She was attempting to turn complex issues, always bound to be problematic, into simple answers – each of which assumed a solution.

An understanding of Leon Festinger's theory of 'cognitive dissonance' introduced in *When Prophecy Fails* (1956) is useful when approaching this subject. Festinger's

example is of Keetch's 'Brotherhood of the Seven Rays', and its link to George Hunt Williamson's *Secret of the Andes* (1961) written under the *nom de plume* Brother Philip. This book, which had cemented the bond between Fred and Mary, reveals how contradictory messages can become congruent within a group. The prediction of the Earth's destruction, supposedly sent by aliens to the leader of the group, became a 'disconfirmed expectancy' that caused dissonance between the cognitions – 'the world is going to end' and 'the world did not end'. Although some members abandoned the group when the prophecy failed, most of the members lessened their dissonance by accepting a new belief: that the planet was spared because of the faith of the group (Festinger 1956).<sup>232</sup>

### **On Accepting Cosmic Contradictions**

The Robinsons seemed to think that simply by saying what is to follow, they had found the key that unlocked the door to *Cosmic Reality*. They were in fact just doing what everyone else was doing – making assumptions about what seemed to be true to them. Because they intoned the axiom, '*Truth is what IS*' (or was to them then, even though some of it later turned out not to be) they believed they were on the inside track to '*UNDERSTANDING COSMIC REALITY*':

*NOW is the time for the co-ordination of all aspects of Truth ... in all religions, theories, systems and isms ... by tolerance, discrimination & intuition a more balanced and complete picture of LIFE and its meaning, both here and hereafter, may be realised.*

*There is only one religion in the whole Universe & that is TRUTH – THE UNDERSTANDING OF COSMIC REALITY – What IS, & NOT what man thinks it is – OUR SEARCH IS FOR THAT TRUTH.*

*Our friends throughout the Globe are developing E.S.P. faculties ... which were used in ages long past, but the New Vibration the Planet is now entering is re-awakening dormant Glands & old powers are being revived ... The Children now being born are highly developed souls and these faculties will be commonplace to them ... They will be able to read our thoughts & know our motives ... the day of the spy, the hypocrite & political intrigue is fast drawing to an end ... peopled with Beings who know each other's thoughts, there will be no need for inspection teams or test bans, or even atom*

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<sup>232</sup> The group of believers, headed by "Marion Keech" (real name: Dorothy Martin (1900-1992), later known as Sister Thedra) had taken strong behavioural steps to indicate their degree of commitment to the belief. They had left jobs, college, and spouses, and had given away money and possessions to prepare for their departure on the flying saucer ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/When\\_Prophesy\\_Fails](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/When_Prophesy_Fails), accessed 13.12.2010). If the Robinsons even knew about Festinger's book, or the earlier experience of Sister Thedra's group, they never mentioned it to the members of the UBI; they certainly reprinted some of Sister Thedra's channelling in *Shalam Light*.

*bombs, for with these powers will develop the desire TO SERVE & help each other & no longer will man seek to destroy but only to Create to The Universal Pattern of "The Good, The TRUE and The Beautiful"* (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, January 1964, p. 6).

It was a utopian conception. While many people hope and pray for such a Golden Age, most recognise that they can't live effectively too far outside the system in which they are placed. The Robinsons weren't *most people* though. They were visionaries; a strange mix of anachronism and futurism, seeking to be exemplars of sensible, sustainable practices and life-style reform, some fifty years ahead of the world in which they had to function. At the same time they were also promoting a *cosmic escape plan* that seems now to have been of little help to anyone and caused hardship for some – especially those who took this aspect of the message too seriously. The issues related to how the planet was about to experience the *Cosmic Operation* that would change everything, were tackled here by Mary:

*We are constantly being asked what will happen to those who are not ready to go on with the Planet into the New Vibration. We have been given to understand that they will be removed to other planets that are already prepared for them, & will find themselves very much at home in a vibration suited to their present stage of development or soul evolvment. It is like the end-of-school-term exam ... (ibid.).*

and so went the evolving metaphor for a long paragraph, finishing with the following:

*... It is as if the Planet Earth is being changed from a Primary School into a High School & those students who pass the exam will go with it after the holidays (ibid.).*

The term '*we have been given to understand*' was commonly used by the Robinsons. It is a phrase that didn't really excuse them if they were wrong, but does make it clear that some higher authority who had the *Knowledge* told them what would be happening.

Briefly put, the cosmic *holiday* was to begin with a series of world-wide catastrophes. Every time an earthquake or other natural disaster would occur, it was interpreted (particularly by Fred) as a signal for the start of the *purification of the planet*. But just before this catastrophic *clean-up*, those who had been gauged as qualifying *to go with the Planet into the New Age*, would be *beamed up* into hovering flying saucers and taken to cigar-shaped mother-ships for a trip around the local universe, while the *less evolved souls* would experience some substantial gnashing of teeth for a while, and then death. After this their souls would be whooshed off to suitable planets where they

could become students again – having learnt a salutary lesson about the need to listen to a prophet’s message. In the following Mary explained the inevitability and need for both *Cosmic* or *Christ Consciousness* and the *Planetary Transformation* about to occur, in this instance using an evolutionary rationale, followed by a sunrise metaphor – an almost mandatory trope when discussing *the dawning of the Age of Aquarius*:

*The Cosmic Consciousness necessary for the New-Age is an awareness of our place in the Cosmos. Man first developed Self Consciousness, then National Consciousness, then International Consciousness and now Cosmic Consciousness ... this is the Christ Consciousness that Jesus taught 2,000 years ago. The Planet and those who are ready must go on, at the appointed time, for nothing can stop the process anymore than anyone can stop the Sun rising in the morning. We are a wayward people & have lived in the darkness so long that we have become used to it & the Light (TRUTH) is like a foreign intrusion to us; however, for those who can bear The Light the “WAY” is clear. It is our responsibility to demonstrate The Truth – to help put right that which we helped put wrong (Broun, in Shalam Light, January 1964, p. 6).*

The ideas proposed in the last sentence were a challenge to us New Agers. We argued that the social system was wrong, and we wanted to ‘put things right’, by working at the ‘grass roots’ level. We sincerely wanted to do *God’s will* rather than *Big Brother’s will*. While I suspect that, like me, many of the New Agers who aligned themselves with the Robinsons were ambivalent about the full extent of their *Cosmic Plan* (and even more sceptical about its imminence), we were absolutely sure that world transformation needed to start from the foundations. This was the hook that we were born to take – and worms were literally the bait:

*To start at the very bottom, with the Worms themselves & begin to LIVE as the GODS meant Man to LIVE with pure Air, Food & Water and set a pattern for the Children that are now being born on to our Planet. And that is what we are doing at SHALAM, establishing a working model of a “Way of Life”, that, when it is proven as a superior way to live, others may go and do likewise as an example & as a refuge, or Sanctuary for HIS Children. The Plan is not ours. We have no plan ... we daily follow the guidance of GOD as it comes through ... by obeying the “Still small voice within” (Broun, in Shalam Light, January 1964, p. 6).<sup>233</sup>*

Explaining what they were doing at Shalam, without plans, and relying on God’s daily guidance, introduces a bold ecumenical initiative, mirroring the ecumenism of the World Council of Churches within mainstream churches, and the present *Multifaith*

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<sup>233</sup> Mary refers here to the ‘still small voice’ which is the basis for the practice of ‘expectant waiting’ used in the Unprogrammed Quaker Tradition’s *Meetings for Worship*, where the congregation sit in silence to ‘hear more clearly the “still small voice within”’ (Marsha Holliday, website of Religious Society of Friends (<http://www.fgcquaker.org/library/welcome/silentworship.html>, accessed 1.10.2008).

initiative. This connection was then evolving however within the domain of Light Centres and New Spiritual and Religious Movements:

*Our coming to Shalam is a testimony, or dedication, in that we are here to do GOD'S WILL in whatever way HE guides or directs us.*

*The idea came to us, recently, to set up a New-Age Information Council, for the purpose of enlightening the masses, as they awaken to the reality of our Planet's changing conditions. We felt that they would not find the answers to their questions among the accepted human authorities & that something new was needed; so we sent out a circular to various groups of Light with which we were in contact, & on Sunday December 1<sup>st</sup> 1963 we held our first meeting ... twenty students from 5 groups of Light attended, & we feel a very good basis was laid upon which to build.*

*The meeting was purely Spiritual & consisted of several members reading short articles by Ascended Masters & alternated by silence. We feel that by creating an atmosphere that is positive, constructive and reverent we will attract the influence of Higher Beings capable of expanding our conscious awareness of that which is needed, & so build a basis for unity from which to expand (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, January 1964, p.7).*

While the above was, at the time, a valiant attempt to bring rival channels together, the following text is written as if half-expecting trouble between the *Light Centres*. Mary muses about the future of the initiative, with a less than convincing attempt to sound positive about the council being visualised. Conflicting groups following a particular New Age channel tend to be extremely precious about themselves, seeming to exude the very egotism they typically deplore in other channels and groups, and thus, in a feat of gymnastic blindness ignoring the same tendency in themselves. New Religious Movements rarely find unanimous agreement with other NRMs. One of the very positive aspects of the later Universal Brotherhood was the eclectic nature of our belief pool – yet on the other hand this freedom of belief was also a major weaknesses:

*Although we will probably follow our next Meeting by a Business meeting, it is our belief that all Controversies & differences can best be resolved by silent listening & not by fruitless disputes. We believe that all matters can be dealt with by contributing constructive suggestions & seeking unanimous agreement for action.*

*We feel that the extent of our usefulness will be determined by the degree of harmony we are able to maintain, & although we know of no precedent for this form of activity we are visualising, we have every confidence in its reliability (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, January 1964, p. 8).*

Such leaps of faith were not uncommon in the later Universal Brotherhood. The belief that people could make uncharacteristic changes, despite all evidence to the contrary, was almost an article of faith itself, especially when we were not quite sure of exactly

what changes were needed for one *to vibrate with*, or *attune to*, the all-important but elusive harmonic communal note which we called ‘The Consciousness’. Mary goes on to almost admit that there was a real problem with the New Age Council:

*The Unity of different aspects of Truth has always been difficult, probably because each knows that in the conception they have there is Truth, & because to them, at the moment, it is completely satisfying & wholly absorbing, it seems to embody the whole truth. However as man evolves up Jacob’s Ladder of Cosmic Understanding ... he begins to realise that each Religious Order is but a glimmer of Light in a world of darkness, & that the whole Truth is greater than the measure of the human mind (which the Urantia Book states is amongst the least mature in the Master Universe).*

*For some strange reason apparent contradictions have always flourished in the field of Spiritual Science. However the truth of a matter remains what it is regardless of opinions, beliefs and statements to the contrary; & we are finding that by leaving these apparent contradictions on the sidewalk of our consciousness ... by concerning ourselves with perfecting the machinery of tolerance, in our own sphere of influence, & operating the Laws of Life, as they become apparent to us, we hope to play our small part in the Master Plan now being acted out on our lovely Planet (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, January 1964, p. 8).*

The idea of ‘*leaving apparent contradiction on the sidewalk of our consciousness*’ was by the 1970s amended to Fred’s stock answer about contradictory ‘truths’: ‘*keep both versions in the corner of your consciousness for clarification at a later date*’.<sup>234</sup> This idea allowed one to get on with the job at hand while waiting for the contradiction to resolve itself by the appearance of a missing link. Almost as if to exemplify the truth of this *missing-link theory*, and to show the reader that divine assistance was at hand,

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<sup>234</sup> This is not far from David Eagleman’s *Possibilianism*, a position first explored in *Sum: Forty Tales of the Afterlife* (2009). In the following Eagleman explains his position:

... our ignorance of the cosmos is too vast to commit to atheism, and yet we know too much to commit to a particular religion. A third position, agnosticism, is often an uninteresting stance in which a person simply questions whether his traditional religious story (say, a man with a beard on a cloud) is true or not true. But with Possibilianism I’m hoping to define a new position – one that emphasises the exploration of new, unconsidered possibilities. Possibilianism is comfortable holding multiple ideas in mind; it is not interested in committing to any particular story (‘Stray Questions for: David Eagleman’, an interview by Blake Wilson, *Arts Beat*, 10.7.2009; online, <http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/>, accessed 12.8.2011).

If there were to be a movement I might one day join, to enjoy fellowship of my *multiple-possible-beliefs*, it might be this one. While I have resisted expounding my own present positions in this study, I feel I should somewhere say that I consider myself a *faith-imbued Possibilian*. Ever since my early twenties I have enjoyed an unshaken personal faith *in* God – while having been shaken of almost all beliefs *about* God. I have opted for an acceptance of multiple-possibilities regarding the mechanics of how, when and why the universe works. While I continue to deepen my faith and love for God and people (most of the time), I take an inquisitive, interested, engaged and yet relaxed position regarding the firmly held beliefs of others. I feel it would have been disingenuous had I not made a statement of some kind about my present beliefs in a paper that explores so many beliefs. I try not to be too dogmatic about my *Possibilian Faith*, a stance which I suspect has grown out of the Robinsonian practice of *keeping conflicting truths in the corner of one’s consciousness for clarification at a later date* – forty years later many supposed ‘truths’ are still awaiting clarification on ‘*the sidewalks*’ of my consciousness.



Mary goes on to cite a sentence in one of the channelled messages recently received, suggesting it provided an answer to the issue under discussion. I suspect the whole discussion, but particularly the following solution, was designed to help placate internal disharmony already brewing in the then recently formed New Age Council:

*Since writing the last paragraph a message has come through from Sologa Group to the effect that many apparent contradictions are purposely planned in order to develop our power of discrimination (Broun, in Shalam Light, January 1964, p. 8).<sup>235</sup>*

This is a fine example of Festinger's 'cognitive dissonance' (1956) at work; however there is an interesting element of postmodern 'truth' in the *Sologarian solution*. Mary continues:

*This to me is something of a shock, & I think it will be to others also; and yet I do feel that it must be the answer to a matter which has been puzzling.*

*SOLOGO says: "Many things that have been spoken through Channels in the past have been little test problems on which all of you might practise discrimination".*

*Is this the answer to all these apparent contradictions? Are we being trained to stand on our own two feet – to get our answers from within and ... as is stressed so very much in The OAH SPE BOOK? Are we crossing the threshold of a new conscious awareness of what is, REALITY: out of the fold of dependence on books, opinions, beliefs etc.; using these only as pointers or evidence with which to develop our own inner convictions? Are we being trained to get on with the job of that which we know is needed, and to leave the answers to conflicting reports to be conveyed to us as, & when, required.*

*Yes! I feel that this must be the awful Truth ... What think you? Shocking though it may seem it is also heartening because, if this is true, then when it is known & fully understood it will remove many barriers to UNITY & we will be well on our way to realising the Reality of the Brotherhood of Man (Broun, in Shalam Light, January 1964, p. 9).*

The idea of this local New Age Council thus explained, the initial meeting described, the potential problems explored, and the *Sologosolution* supplied – all as a soliloquy within the 'The Story of Shalam' – Mary now returns to the story of the development of Shalam. Picking up the thread, Mary reflects on her own storytelling and announces another initiative – hot off her own *inspirational-press*.

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<sup>235</sup> I can find no reference to this Sologa group outside the Robinsons' texts, suggesting that this stream of channelling was short-lived.

## On Orphanage Visitors

Fred and Mary Robinson were sincere and kind-hearted people who ‘thought *cosmically* and acted locally’; one step up from the ‘thinking *globally* and acting locally’ claim endemic amongst twenty-first century *Cultural Creatives* (Ray 2000).

*It seems a long time now since I first started writing this story. I keep adding bits, and now I find myself only a few days from Xmas; and a new idea has come to us. Briefly, it is that now is the time to start working with young people. Therefore we have invited six boys from orphanages, between the ages of 10 & 12, to spend Xmas with us; but more of this at a later date.*

*We have planned to get this edition of “Our Shalam Story” out by the New Year, so it is now time to draw to a close... (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, January 1964, p. 9).*

The *modus operandi* of Shalam was unusual, for they took the rare and surprising step of actually putting their ideas into practice – in modern parlance ‘they walked their talk’. When they had an inspiration or ‘guidance’, they *just did it*. One of Mary’s favourite aphorisms was ‘It is better to do a thing badly than not to do it at all’. While other New Age theorists *armchaired* their spiritual ideas for years, the Robinsons would say, ‘We’ve done that now God; what would you have us do next?’ With vigour and sincerity they lived a life of unremitting guidance followed by action – completely unperturbed by the results. Often the reversing of actions and claims of guidance were seen as part of the process of living the unattached spiritual life. Another of Mary’s favourite sayings was, ‘If God told me to plant carrots today, but then He told me to rake over the plot tomorrow, I would do it happily’; this idea became decidedly unpopular with the ‘carrot-planters’ in the later Community – and with many others who found God’s ever-changing ‘Plan’ inconsistent, inconvenient and unfulfilling.

Even with all this action on the guidance they received, Fred was deprecating of his own *talking about the New Age*; he wanted to see it lived. He hated the idea that what he was speaking about was *all hot air*. Having said this, Fred was proud of himself as a *catalyst*. Seeing other people taking action justified his lecturing in his own eyes. This was especially clear in his later *recruiting tours* of the early 1970s. He seemed to have no regrets about the effect his speaking had on others as they changed the courses of their lives, often taking drastic personal actions, such as leaving *hu-man* partners and *hu-man* jobs to start *fraternities for the benefit of the whole of*

*mankind*. Whatever one could say about the Robinsons' efforts from the 1960s Shalam New Age Information Centre to the 1980s Universal Brotherhood Community, their determination and energy for praxis was unswerving, especially since Fred Robinson was already in his seventies when he met the just-turning-fifty Mary Broun.

### **On Feelings of Rejection**

Before drawing 'Our Shalam Story' to a close, Mary seems to take on Fred's persona, taking up and then harking back to the theme of Fred's '*years of rejection*', while sharing a testimony of her own faith in his message. Mary uses signature word-clusters of Fred's from the ROTA days (I have emphasised these by bolding them):

*We have had a "Rock" to cling to, during **the years of rejection** & non-acceptance of **vital Truths**, and it was based on **our own experience**, which gave us an **unshakable conviction** of the **practical, down to earth & truly scientific nature of the New Age Instruction**. When your own life has been saved by the application of its truths **as to the CAUSE of human problems and illness** then **no-one can erase** what has been **imprinted upon your own soul** (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, January 1964, p. 9).*

Mary had been at Shalam for only six months, and with Fred for fourteen months, so she was clearly speaking for Fred more than for herself when she writes of 'the years of rejection'. In completing 'Our Shalam Story', Mary shares a testimonial, which seeks to assure the reader of the efficacy of Fred's New Age instruction and his interpretation of both the *Oahspe Bible* and *The Urantia Book*:

*Fred laid emphasis time and again upon the statement in Oahspe that the Individual is responsible for his/her own environment & the consequences accruing therefrom, be they good or evil, to ourselves & those dependent upon us.*

*As with all statements he has made (based on the instruction contained in OAHSPÉ and the Urantia Books) relative to the 'Way of Life' advised for those who are seeking Health and happiness, **whilst functioning in a physical body on this 3 dimensional plane** – I have made the opportunity to test them out, on a practical basis. I found that this instruction is **designed to bring about BALANCE** between the two extremes of Spiritualism and Materialism (**and all other 'isms'**) & **I can assure all** of our interested well-wishers **THAT IT WORKS**. I have never been so well and Happy in my whole life as I am now (**'the purpose of all learning is to be happy, both here and hereafter...'** OAHSPÉ) & on that note I will leave you. We sincerely hope that you will make 1964 the happiest year you have ever known, **as I intend to do**.*

*Love and Blessings from "SHALAM"*

*Mary* (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, January 1964, p. 9).

This testimonial text is also littered with Fred's own emphatic word clusters (bolded again) – and couple of raised-voice capitalisations too – such as '**THAT IT WORKS**'. By early 1964 Mary has taken up much of Fred's idiom, while Fred was including some of Mary's specialist words in his own lexicon.

### **Sologo and Fred's Afterword**

The last two pages of the 'Our Shalam Story' edition of *Shalam Light*, following directly on from Mary's farewell above, are made up of yet longer excerpts from the Sologo Group 13 channelled message referred to by Mary, and include a final postscript or afterword from Fred. The following extracts from these *Sologotexts* provide the gist of a message which ironically could have been written to warn readers about the Robinsons' own prophetic *messages* regarding the planetary evacuation they were predicting. Perhaps those that didn't listen passed a test:

**BE ALERT FOR TRUE AND FALSE TESTS**

*This year will be a time of greater learning in Discrimination for all Channels & all Group members. Many things that have been spoken through Channels in the past have been little test problems on which all of you might practise discrimination. It is a sad thing when anyone feels that every word that comes through a Channel **MUST BE ACCEPTED WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION**, must be swallowed whole, as it were.*

*Many people have placed their faith in men or women, and then found that those whom they had put on a pedestal were just common people, with the same faults, the same blind spots as all the rest. ... If one whom you trust gives forth a message which does not come to pass, then what do you think?*

*You may think that in some way or other the message is misunderstood, or it did not come through clearly (which may be the case) or it is warped by the beliefs of the Channel & therefore not clear channelling. But – much more probably **IT IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU TO PRACTISE DISCRIMINATION**. How could you learn which statements were true or false, unless you were given some which were not true on which to practise (Sologo 13, in *Shalam Light*, January 1964, p. 11).*

The Robinsons' capitalisation of some of the phrases above sends a message to recalcitrant members of the New Age Council they were convening. While this message warns about blind faith in charismatic leaders and channels, it ironically builds confidence in the *Sologo-channelled* message. Intentionally recycling this message claims an overview, or cosmic perspective on the whole channelling milieu. It places the editors of *Shalam Light* as impartial. They are represented by their editorial function as being able to stand back, view all perspectives, and formulate the *Cosmic Viewpoint* – how things really are. This is a position of power, even if its authors are unconscious

of the controlling subtext in their overarching proposition. Excerpts from Fred's afterword to this edition are useful in understanding his position. His inclusion of a quote from *Oahspe* is in character with his quoting of a reference book to add weight to a position:

*I was mildly surprised at Mary's reaction, when I drew her attention to it [the Sologo message] ... I had been saturated with the teachings given through such cosmic sources as OAH SPE, and there the emphasis is upon individual initiative and complete freedom of choice:*

*'I will make man understand that he shall accept nothing from Angels or men, because of the name professed. On the merit only of wisdom and Truth, & such good doctrines as raise men up out of darkness & poverty and crime, shall they accept written and spoken words' (from Oahspe) (Robinson, in Shalam Light, January 1964, p. 11).*

While not mentioning his deceased teacher's name, Fred goes on to cite Ione Long's advice regarding 'feelings', followed by a reference to Albert Einstein:

*My own beloved Teacher continually stressed the importance of cultivating "feelings" rather than intellect. Not only does love come under that heading but also the musteriorous [sic] faculty we refer to as "Intuition" which I suppose could in one sense, be defined as the ability to recognise Truth, as distinct from opinions and beliefs.*

*Albert Einstein included Intuition with Inspiration and Imagination (as exercised by a trained and disciplined mind) as man's most valuable instruments for acquiring knowledge (Truth) ... These are among the higher faculties that the New-Age Instruction, now being made available to all who ask, is designed to develop – especially in the young people – thus fitting them to function freely and independently in a world of 4 demensions [sic], instead of the 3 the humanity of this Planet have limited themselves to, throughout the dark ages of ignorance – which is now in the process of being dispelled forever ... (Robinson, in Shalam Light, January 1964, p. 11).*

These last two paragraphs are classic examples of Fred Robinson's writing: giant leaps of logic, expressed in long, unwieldy sentences, bulging with mind-boggling and unsubstantiated assertions – with quotes from *Oahspe*, supplemented by references to people like Einstein and Ghandi to bolster the text's credibility. The spelling errors – 'musterious' and 'demensions' – add extra near Freudian-slip suggestions.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> A Freudian slip, also called *parapraxis*, is an error in speech, memory, or physical action that is interpreted as occurring due to the interference of some unconscious ('dynamically repressed') wish, conflict, or train of thought. The concept is thus part of classical psychoanalysis ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freudian\\_slip](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freudian_slip), accessed 13.12.2010).

## **On Shalam's Lucky 13**

Without a new heading, and perhaps with the simple intent of filling in the final two inches of the last page of this issue, Fred shares a publishing decision with their readers and finishes with an advertisement:

*We have decided to make 'SHALAM LIGHT' a monthly publication, to be issued on the 13<sup>th</sup> of each month, with special editions when the need should arise. The 13<sup>th</sup> has assumed a great significance in our progress and program: so much so that we have developed a great affection for it. By the 13<sup>th</sup> of March we shall have been at Shalam 9 months, the gestative period, & our dream child would have materialised to a point where it will become visible to all who choose to take notice of it.  
(The OAH SPE Book can be obtained from H. Delmar, 87 John St, Merrylands N.S.W. 37/6 post-paid) F.R. (Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, January 1964, p. 11).*

This 'Story of Shalam' edition of *Shalam Light* has introduced the main themes and key principles of the movement – ideals and principles which remained much the same in the 1970s and '80s. In the second section of this examination of the Robinsons' *Shalam Light* publications, I have selected central and recurrent themes and preoccupations, to help characterise the major achievements and challenges of the later UBI Community. *The way the Community related to its neighbourhood, and the evolving central beliefs* need to be addressed before considering the impact and importance of Mary's trip to contact *Light Centres* world-wide in second half of 1964.

## **Part 2: Continuing the Shalam Story**

The following excerpts from the February 1964 *Shalam Light* help to place the Robinsons within their neighbourhood, via Mary's description of a small social experiment they made:

*An interesting experiment was made last week with a Potato Barbeque. Four families of close neighbours were invited, providing a total of 17 children, ranging from 5 to 16 years old. The quality of each and all these children is impressive and significant. We find we have very nice neighbours. It was a very pleasant evening, with the lights of Perth twinkling in the distance, like Fairyland (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, February 1964, p. 1).*

The comment about the ‘quality’ of these children speaks of the Robinsons’ belief that only evolved souls were incarnating onto our planet after 1959.<sup>237</sup> The *New Age Children* trope was a major theme of Fred’s when speaking to my generation in the early 1970s. For young idealists to be told that we *were the hope of the world* was manna from heaven. We already suspected we were something special, so to have Fred confirm it was helpful in turning what our parents hoped was ‘a phase’ into a seemingly viable way of life. Not for ourselves would we do this, but as *a demonstration model for the children*, the next generation of even more impressive beings than ourselves.

Evidently the Shalam potato barbeque had an effect on one of the young attendees. My research field trip back to the neighbourhood in December 2004 revealed the good relationship the locals had with the ‘way-out’ but kindly Robinsons:

*Even the mundane tasks were taken care of by our ‘Friends of Light’. One day, when the household chores were piling up, a knock came to the door & there stood a little girl who asked if she could do some jobs for us. Eleven year old Cherrilyn, with her boundless energy, efficiency & gentle cheerfulness has proved to be a blessing indeed. Each morning she comes, & for a couple of hours does many little jobs, like dishes, sweeping etc. that would take me as long* (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, February 1964, p. 1).

I remember Mary telling me about this young, willing worker. Instances of this kind of assistance were seen as evidence that they were tapping into the *Law of Abundance* through the use of positive ‘decrees’.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> The same sorts of postulations are being made today by the author and New Age teacher ‘Doreen Virtue, PhD’ about *Indigo Children* and *Crystal Children*:

The Indigo Children have been incarnating on the Earth for the last 100 years. The early Indigos were pioneers and wayshowers. After World War II, a significant number were born, and these are the Indigo adults of today... The Crystal Children began to appear on the planet from about 2000, although some date them slightly earlier. These are extremely powerful children, whose main purpose is to take us to the next level in our evolution, and reveal to us our inner power and divinity. They function as a group consciousness rather than as individuals, and they live by the ‘Law of One’ or Unity Consciousness. They are a powerful force for love and peace on the planet (<http://www.starchild.co.za/what.html>, accessed 24.3.2010).

<sup>238</sup> ‘Decrees’ (affirmations spoken aloud) had been recited in The I AM Activity, an *Ascended Master group* (see footnote 208), and its off-shoot, the Bridge to Freedom group (see footnote 209). These two groups, along with Florence Scovel-Shinn’s text, *Your Word is Your Wand* (1928), had taught Mary techniques of how to call upon *The Divine Power of The Word* to assist in *The Work*. These decrees, which Mary later taught to Community members, initially felt anachronistically uncomfortable – and yet we read the books which extolled them, and said these decrees together in the regular group services. These decrees – many of them examples of *high-weirdness* – became perhaps the most unusual aspect of the UBI culture and its rituals, causing the group to be assessed as being more *highly weird* in the eyes of outsiders, than we perhaps were. I had purchased Catherine Ponder’s *the Dynamic Laws of Prosperity* (1962) from a Theosophical Bookshop just prior to meeting Fred and Mary; this text, along with David

## The No Planning Plan

An air of magic did seem to imbue the Robinsons' life at Shalam. Everything, including the little details of timing of events, seemed to line up – the phrase '*all is well and going according to Plan*' was an oft used affirmation. In the 1970s we used to call it being *in the flow*, or being in a state of *attunement*. Here Mary relates an example of this *being-in-tune-with-a-spiritual-master-plan* idea that organised life at Shalam. However, as real as this was for Fred and Mary at Shalam, they lost credibility when they drew a much longer bow in denigrating all human planning:

*The timing of our visitors has been interesting to observe & worth mentioning. Quite often one party will leave and 5 minutes later another will arrive. All these little things add up to form a pattern to reveal a Master Mind behind the scenes. We make no plans ourselves – how dare we? The day is already planned. We merely fit into it, as it comes along. Life is so much more exciting when you know that loving friends are planning it for you – a bit like a party on a Higher Level (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, February 1964, p. 1).*

As already demonstrated, the Robinsons appreciated any volunteer work which was done. Mary's position was that while no one should feel obliged to assist them, anyone who was working there *should love what they are doing; and if they didn't love it, then they shouldn't be there:*

*Our thanks go out to those kind friends who worked so hard at the 'Working Bee'. We now have a Car Park, thanks to our wharfie friend. SHALAM also now has a sand patch play area for the children. We feel encouraged to invite friends to a second Working Bee on February 22<sup>nd</sup> (Sat.). However, we do wish to stress that this is to be regarded as a privilege for those who are free to attend & not an obligation (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, February 1964, p. 1).*

At the end of this edition Fred and Mary make a distinction about working, which connects with the comment on 'work bees' above, and was later threaded through the Universal Brotherhood's Communities:

*On the practical side we draw a sharp line of demarcation between 'Working to LIVE' & working for a living. There is no lack in the former, because it is in the natural order of things but the latter (as accepted by modern materialistic civilisation) is a negative destructive concept based upon the inherent selfishness of an immature hu-manity, soon to be superseded by His Children of the Light (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, February 1964, p. 15).*

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Spangler's later writing about the *The Laws of Manifestation* (1975), elucidated and then extended these 'New Age Laws' in more *baby-boomer-friendly* language. Later, more 'Decree Work' was studied in the Community through the teachings of other exponents of the practice, particularly Elizabeth Claire Prophet (see footnote 246). Some Seekers and Members found these group decree sessions (said aloud in the services) too strange and perhaps embarrassing, while others become so engaged with this *Decree Work* they wanted to do more. This issue caused considerable conflict at one point in the early '80s.



While this idealistic stance worked well for retired pensioners, it became a concept which *othered* us from society, as careers were sacrificed to this ideal.

## **Mary Publishes a ‘Revealed Message’**

In line with their penchant for redeeming the Devil’s number, Mary decided to use this February 13<sup>th</sup> edition – their thirteenth issue – to begin disseminating her own inspirations. Both the number thirteen and Mary’s guidance and dreams were features of the later Universal Brotherhood. Here they are seen in their infancy – the first a quirky and relatively insignificant predilection that stuck; the second a methodology that shaped the lives of scores, if not hundreds, of spiritual seekers who were to work with the Robinsons in the later Universal Brotherhood:

*This Shalam Light is No. 13, & as the number 13 seems to be playing an important part in this project, we were wondering in what way we could identify it. The Thought occurred to us that it was time to pass on to you some of the revealed messages that have been coming to me by dreams, visions, inspirations etc. I have had these dreams for many years, but only of recent times have I come to understand something of their meaning... This interpretation is based on a vision that has been the source of my inspiration for the formation of the New Age Information Council ... (Broun, in Shalam Light, February 1964, p. 15).*

The following is an example of the kind of guidance that Mary often shared with the UBI Community. Such messages gave hope to those Members awaiting Fred’s promised *breakthrough to the mass consciousness*, where the *New Age Truths* would be widely taught and eagerly accepted:

### ***THE AWAKENING OF THE MASSES:***

*I saw the masses of people suddenly awakening to THE TRUTH OF THE TIMES IN WHICH WE ARE LIVING.*

*The scales had fallen from their eyes, & TRUTH was revealed to their hearts. Many people who had previously appeared unconcerned with Spiritual matters evidently had an inner evolvment of which they had been unaware, but with the incoming vibrations & changing events a sudden awakening occurs. I then saw the need for Teachers, Lecturers, Social Workers etc. to enlighten the great numbers, hungry to KNOW the Truth, & willing & able to apply it, in their daily lives.*

*I saw little Lecture Rooms, Centres, set up in every district to teach the Laws of Life and how to apply them.*

*I saw the Harvest of the willing applicants.*

*Mary (Broun, in Shalam Light, February 1964, p. 16)*

## The Shalam Hymn

The Broun family's home-composed signature hymn 'Shalam' is worth quoting here as it sums up the Robinsons' geographic positioning; their desire to be a place of peace and a shining Light Centre; their sense of connection to other non-human *Beings* such as angels; and their ideal of service in creating a holy space where people are aware of God in their daily lives:

*Shalam, Shalam, Jewel among the hill tops,  
Shining, Shining, O little place of peace.  
Waiting, Serving, guarded by the Angels,  
O little holy spot where God and man may meet.*

Everyone who spent some time at Shalam from the mid-1960s until it was sold in 1975 would be able to nostalgically sing this song – for it was sung often.

## Practical Proofs

The sincere desire of the Robinsons to practise the spiritual laws they were espousing is evident in the following text from Fred, which moves the reader from the realms of cosmic ponderings to back-garden experiences with the bees – and thence to the moral of the story:

*We get simple practical everyday proofs of this [spiritual assistance and protection] at Shalam as we put into practice The Laws of Love & Service to the Plant and Animal kingdoms. One instance occurred recently, when friends presented us with two hives of Bees. I had a little theoretical knowledge of their Way of Life, but no practical handling. Mary had neither.*

*We discovered that one hive was weak and infected with moth. In opening the hive, for the first time we arrayed ourselves in the approved orthodox fashion with protective garb, veiled & dense smoke [using a smoke machine]. A week later Mary announced, in a firm voice, that we must inspect the hive at least once a week & make sure of getting rid of all intruders in the Hive worrying the Bees. She also stated that she felt sure the Bees knew we were co-operating with them & they would not sting her.*

*As it was a hot day all she wore was a pair of light shorts & a short-sleeved blouse, with no hat or veil. She cleaned every frame in the hive, right down to the brood chamber. She never got a sting or any cause of agitation whatever (Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, Supplement, December 1963).*

## ***Hu-man Offensiveness***

Fred could never resist driving a point home to the advantage of his own position; and in doing so he often offended some of his audience, or lost others who thought he was extreme – both in his statements and the intensity with which he made them. The following text which ran on from the above story about the way Mary handled the bees, is a good example of why Fred so often put people off both his ideas and himself as a person:

*... Bees are extremely sensitive creatures (as human beings were meant to be) & they have a very keen sense of smell. The average civilised hu-man being who drinks alcohol, absorbs nicotine & eats animal flesh has an extremely offensive body odour, especially in hot weather. Hu-mans are so accustomed to this state of affairs that it is accepted in civilised communities as normal & disguised with perfume and deodorants. But to expose the Bees' babies to such an offensive & disgusting odour is an outrage they will not tolerate & so they are prepared to sacrifice their own lives in an effort to put a stop to it...*

*... The responsibility of the individual is to restore the state of natural, harmonious balance within his own being & within his own immediate environment. . That is what we are doing here, at SHALAM, in the belief that "The TRUTHS of life are simple and open" – there is nothing complicated about them at all. . And that is the gist of our Xmas Message to you. . HEALTH & HAPPINESS IS YOUR BIRTHRIGHT – Have the courage to claim it. (ibid.).*

I have left Fred's double full stop punctuation in the final paragraph of his almost aggressive *Christmas challenge*, as it further colours his injunctive homily to the *Shalam Light* readership in this supplement which was entitled 'To wish you a Blessing at Christmas'. That this intense *lecturetext* led directly to Fred's Christmas message seems insensitive – unless you knew Fred Robinson. Fred's ability to be inappropriate was even more breathtaking in real life situations. His zeal never wore off. The written word gives only an inkling of his social ineptness when in the presence of *hu-mans* who were not on his cosmic wavelength. He was painfully aware of his social disabilities, but unable to do much about them. It was how he was wired, or gradually re-wired himself. Fred sorely needed a minder and spin-doctor to make him accessible to others; and Mary Broun was all of these and more – a loving *soul mate*.

Having said this, Fred was almost impossible to control. He was a true wild-card. Mary told me once that he sometimes added something just before a *Shalam Light* went to

press, and she would be embarrassed to read his spontaneous and unedited inclusion. He was used to being his own boss, and found aspects of the cooperation he extolled for others, difficult to execute personally. Only much later was Mary able to put her foot down on Fred's inappropriateness; and she needed the help of others in the Community, including me, Rosemary Gilmore (née Wood) and other CentreCore members, who all loved Fred but understood his obsessions. Unfortunately, Mary's decision not to be overrun by the aging Fred made her look, often unfairly, like a controlling and manipulative dictator, and a scheming, unloving wife to him.

## **Inappropriate Christmas Scolding**

The final message to the readers of this December 1963 *Shalam Light* was one of these instances where Fred is likely to have acted alone. This critique of the commercialisation of Christmas is made up of excerpts reprinted from one of the channels the Robinsons were corresponding with. A couple of sentences typify this almost unchristian Christmas scolding (even if it may be partially true):

*'...man has greatly distorted the idea of Christmas – so greatly as to make it grotesque ... A very beautiful thing has been desecrated, distorted, disembowelled of all its beauty... It should mean the pledging anew to Him, in His battle for man's righteousness ...' (From The New Cycle's channels, Ambrose and Anola, Spokesmen for Our Lord's Forces to MAN ... The Masters Headquarters) (Broun & Robinson, in Shalam Light, December 1963, p. 12).*

The idea of battling the evil conspiracy was strong in the Robinsons' message, despite their oft repeated saying: *We are not here to combat the negative but to establish the positive.* Their Christmas challenge, concluding with the following message, comprehensively failed to model the peace and goodwill the Robinsons wished to practise:

*Christmas means, in reality, man's greatest opportunity. Why neglect it so? Why not accept the message The Angels brought 'Peace on Earth and goodwill to men' & practise it to one another? (ibid.).*

The penchant for unnecessarily harsh pronouncements from righteous teachers, preachers or channels, in place of loving messages, personal empathy and compassionate blessings, seems to dog many, if not most New Religious Movements. As the UBI evolved, its management too was tending towards forms of centralised authority, at times exercised inappropriately.

## Designing the New Age Information Council

Introducing the readership to the idea of a New-Age Information Council, Mary, clearly in charge of this initiative, presented the idea in the following way:

### ***'NEW-AGE INFORMATION COUNCIL'***

*A move has been made, here at SHALAM, to co-ordinate the Groups of Light into a New-Age Information Council, for the purpose of assisting the masses as they begin to awaken to the realisation of the Planet's changing conditions.*

*We feel that you may be interested & wish to participate in this activity, hence this invitation to you to seek further information, which we would be happy to provide, at your request (Broun, in Shalam Light, December 1963, p. 9).*

### **Saint Germain's Contribution**

This invitation was followed up with two pages of excerpts from the Sologa Group No. 13 channelling St. Germain<sup>239</sup>, which 'was read out in its entirety, at the initial meeting of The New-Age Information Council, held here, at SHALAM, on Sunday the 1<sup>st</sup> December 1963' (Broun in, December 1963, p. 10). There is no doubt that the Robinsons expected big things from the newly instituted council, partly inspired by Saint Germain's 'special mission to circulate among the groups ... A MESSAGE OF UNITY' (ibid.). The tone of this message was quite severe. This Master was not beyond cliché:

*I Am speaking in plain terms. I Am calling a spade a spade. Adults are still embroiled in childish lessons which should have been learned had the influences of home, in childhood, on the character and individuality, been more favourable... but this is seldom to be found... (Saint Germain through Sologa, 12.1.1963) (Reprinted in Shalam Light, December 1963, p. 10).*

Harmony between the New-Age groups was vital, for it would be leading by example – as St. Germain suggests in the last lines of his Sologa-channelled message:

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<sup>239</sup> Saint Germain (a.k.a. master Rakoczi) according to the *Ascended Master* NRMs such as the Theosophical Society, White Eagle Lodge, I AM Activity, Bridge to Freedom, and Church Universal and Triumphant, was/is said to be the specific Ascended Master most responsible for the 'New Age' unfoldment on this planet. Historically known as the *Count of St. Germain* he has been variously described as a courtier, adventurer, charlatan, inventor, alchemist, pianist, violinist and amateur composer, but is best known as a recurring figure in the stories of several strands of occultism ... where he is also referred to as the *Master Rakoczi* or the *Master R* and as one of the Masters of the Ancient Wisdom, credited with near god-like powers and longevity ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Count\\_of\\_St.\\_Germain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Count_of_St._Germain); [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ascended\\_master](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ascended_master); <http://www.saintgermainfoundation.org/>, accessed 13.12.2010).

... when others look they may see the Light of GOD pouring through us. When that happens there will be conscious unity and perfect co-operation, each in his own sphere, singing, with joy in his heart his part in the harmonious anthem of praise to GOD.. SOLOGA..You and I, shoulder to shoulder, shall see the unity manifested among men (ibid., p. 11).

As if to add extra gravitas to the above text, as well as filling up the white-space left on the page, the editors placed in brackets the following text, which revealed why Fred in 1973 discouraged the members of the fledgling Carranya Community from growing Avocados – a tree unlikely to bear fruit in under seven years:

*(The above message, intended for all Spiritual Groups, is in the nature of a serious warning. We have been informed that 1963 is the beginning of the final 10 year cleansing cycle [code for the mother of all cataclysms]. Harmonious Co-operation is part of The Father's Plan & anything less than this "Contains within itself the seed of its own destruction". We believe that the next decade will see the present materialistic civilisation spiritualised, ushering in The Unity of Universal Brotherhood. Ed.)* (Robinson and Broun, in *Shalam Light*, December 1963, p.11).

This text also points to why the name of the Community/Fraternity set in motion by Fred Robinson's 1971 tour just had to be the Universal Brotherhood.

## **Gandhi: A New Age Hero**

The inside leaf of the pink back-cover of this December 1963 issue of *Shalam Light* was devoted to the sayings of Mahatma Gandhi from *All Men are Brothers* (1958).<sup>240</sup> While the whole page was capitalised, Fred could not refrain from underlining one phrase which I suspect he would like to have used to describe his own occupation:

MY HUMBLE OCCUPATION HAS BEEN TO SHOW PEOPLE HOW THEY CAN SOLVE THEIR OWN DIFFICULTIES (Gandhi, in *Shalam Light*, December 1963, p. 13).

The following *Gandhian* quote about groups is also worth recording; especially in the light of the New Age Information Council the Robinsons were forming, and Fred's detached attitude to the later organisation and development of the Universal Brotherhood:

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<sup>240</sup> *All Men Are Brothers* (1958) is a selection from the writings of Mahatma Gandhi compiled for the UNESCO (<http://www.mkgandhi-sarvodaya.org/amabrothers/amabrothers.htm>, accessed 21.4.2010). Fred had copied sections of this first edition and quoted from it from the early 1960s.

*MEETINGS AND GROUP ORGANISATIONS ARE ALRIGHT. THEY ARE OF SOME HELP, BUT VERY LITTLE. THEY ARE LIKE THE SCAFFOLDING THAT AN ARCHITECT ERECTS – A TEMPORARY & MAKESHIFT EXPEDIENT, THE THING THAT REALLY MATTERS IS AN INVINCIBLE FAITH THAT CANNOT BE QUENCHED* (Gandhi, in *Shalam Light*, December 1963, p. 13).

While both Fred and Mary had been admirers of Ghandi and his philosophy, the bracketed endorsement of him below can also be seen as an advertisement for their overarching position regarding Fred's axiom, that *there are no contradictions in truth*. The following text is particularly political when related to the Robinsons' New-Age Council initiative (as well as once again serving the utilitarian purpose of filling in the two inches of pink-space at the bottom of this last page):

*(...Never yet have we come across one of his sayings we could not wholeheartedly subscribe to. . . ALL TRUE teachers speak with ONE Voice. . There can be no contradiction in TRUTH – for GOD is TRUTH as well as LIGHT & LOVE) Ed (ibid.).*

This New Age organisation was run by pluralist thinkers and networkers. When the opportunity presented itself to correspond with other Light Centres, Fred and Mary were soon *linking-up* with them. It wasn't long before it became clear to Mary that she needed to know more about the groups they were contacting – and at first hand. In June 1964 Mary left Perth for London on a well planned tour of the New Age Light Centres in England and America, around the world, and back through New Zealand, to meet Fred in Melbourne and return home.





## Chapter 8: Mary's World Linking Mission

*Shalam Light*, dated August 13th 1964, recounts the story of Mary's around-the-world 'linking mission'. It is one of the few extant editions of *Shalam Light* to forgo the reprinting of any channelled texts *from* other centres. This issue is instead *about* these channels of *cosmicommunication* and what Mary experienced in their presence. Where possible I have included specifics about these New Spiritual and Religious Movements and the individual channels and representatives she *linked up with*, along with her comments about them. This document is historically valuable as an account of the major New Age groups and their channels before they became widely recognised, or alternatively, before they disappeared from the New Age channelling scene altogether.

The texts further make it clear that Mary was the *Visionary* and *Missionary*, and the more formal writer of *Shalam Light*, while Fred was simply the editor, typist and prophet. In a very real sense Mary was in charge of *Shalam*, and Fred was happy to have it that way. He did not want the shackles of responsibility. He knew that what he did best was 'his own thing' – being a prophet and a catalyst in lectures and face-to-face encounters. Here Mary happily took the back seat.

The decision to make such a trip was a very Mary thing to do. Just as earlier in her life she wanted to experience the Christian Churches, then politics, and then New Age groups in Perth and Australia from the inside, now it was time to experience and assess the international New Age movements and meet their channels. Written in the first person, her account can be seen as an early example of a *Spiritual Adventure*, increasingly popular as a sub-genre within *Travel Writing* and novels that teach *New Age* precepts.<sup>241</sup>

The artistically presented opening page (surrounded by decorative vines) presents a concept about personal discovery at the heart of the path of socially driven self-

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<sup>241</sup> Such 'Spiritual Adventures' include Shirley MacLaine's *Camino: A Journey of the Spirit* (2000) which follows her spiritual explorations while walking the ancient pilgrimage of the Way of St. James (*El Camino*); *The Pilgrimage* (1987) a novel by Paulo Coelho which recollects his experiences on the same pilgrimage trail; and James Redfield's novel *Celistine Prophecy* (1993), a novel which discusses various psychological and spiritual ideas which are rooted in many ancient Traditions and New Age Spirituality ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Pilgrimage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Pilgrimage); [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Way\\_of\\_St.\\_James](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Way_of_St._James); [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Celestine\\_Prophecy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Celestine_Prophecy), accessed 13.12.2010).

discovery, and was clearly important to Mary as she presents her overseas pilgrimage to the *Shalam Light* readership:

“THIS IS MY LIFE  
DISCOVERING MY LIFE IN  
EACH OTHER AND THEREFORE  
MORE CLEARLY SEEING ME  
IN OTHERS, HOWEVER LITTLE  
THERE MAY BE, OR HOW  
DEEPLY BURIED”

(Anonymous, in *Shalam Light* August 1964, p. i)

Mary’s reflective writing about her travels is carefully thought through; as though she were aware of a vitally important spiritual message she had been called to share with the *Shalam Light* readership. While informing Australians and New Zealanders about New Age groups, she would also provide feedback to the overseas groups and channels she had just been visiting. Her mission was honoured with more space between the lines:

***To my “FAMILY OF GOD” around the World:–***

*Little did I know when I set out from SHALAM on the 20th June 1964, just what my mission would be. It was conveyed to me that I thought that I was going for one reason but that actually I was going for another. So I expected some form of adventure was in store for me.*

*My Tour was of a spiritual nature. I travelled physically to experience Spiritually.*

*I lived in a World within a World (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, August 1964, p. 1).*

This introduction is a rather neat abstract. The last two sentences particularly encapsulate her tour in her own eyes. From the outset she sees herself as more than just a ‘tourist’ making a ‘trip’, likening the journey much more to a religious adventure or experiential sojourn. It is a complex hybrid of *pilgrimage*, designed to glean blessings from the *Light Centres* she was already in touch with, and a *mission* to investigate, share, and even counsel, the groups she targeted.

The second sentence, 'I lived in a World within a World', succinctly epitomises how those involved in the New Age movement of the 1960s saw themselves – a distinct and almost invisible sub-culture within the broader society. Mary was among the first in the world, and almost certainly the first Australian, to have made an intentional investigative tour of these New Age groups without a specific barrow to push, or a desire to join any of them. She was a genuinely unaligned but empathetic free-agent. Certainly by this time she had researched the New Age movements of the era as thoroughly as anyone in Australia.

## The Universal Link at St Annes

The Robinsons had been in touch with the Universal Link at St. Annes,<sup>242</sup> a Light Centre which formed around Richard Graves and Liebie Pugh, who had each made a connection with a 'bearded Christlike figure', known by Graves as '*Truth*' and by Pugh as '*Limitless Love*'. Mary's first port of call was to this hub of spiritual/prophetic activity:

*It was "The Universal Link" that started it all. We wished to have some firsthand confirmation of this momentous happening. And sure enough, I got my confirmation. Not as I expected – one seldom does.*

*I had hoped to bring back some tears from "The Weeping Angel", in little plastic containers I had packed in the bottom of my case. But the Angel did not weep for me; nor did the Font fill with water, although I saw and held them both.... What then did happen? I met Richard [Graves], Liebie [Pugh] Kathleen [Flemming] & Joan [Hartnell-Beavis]; the principal characters in this great happening (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, August 1964, p. 1).*

One would have perhaps expected a sense of disappointment regarding the failure of the Angel to deliver the sacred tears or water Mary had hoped for, however, Mary didn't need to *see to believe* when she could *feel to know*: '*In the four days I spent with these people I fully experienced the vibrations of this sacred place, & I was satisfied*' (ibid., p.

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<sup>242</sup> The neighbouring towns of Lytham and St-Anne's-on-the-Sea (the latter nearly always abbreviated to St Annes) are a conurbation in the Fylde district of Lancashire, England ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lytham\\_St\\_Annes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lytham_St_Annes), accessed 21.4.2010).

2). Sceptics would quickly point to this immediate acceptance as an example of Festinger's *Cognitive Dissonance* (1956). However, Mary would never have cared about such intellectual theorisation of faith:

*Everything that happens at St Anne's seemed to have a purpose & a meaning. The miracle of my accommodation was not an isolated incident, but rather the Order of the Day, for those who sincerely "Seek" to know the Truth (ibid.).*

The last sentence is an example of the 'teachings' the Robinsons felt they should be giving, whenever sharing personal and specific experiences. They saw themselves as living experiments – people *experiencing the fruits of doing God's Will and living The Laws of Life*. This expectation of being a conscious *Aquarian exemplar* was passed on to the members of Universal Brotherhood – perhaps being the closest definition of the enigmatic state of what we called in the UBI Community, living and being 'in the consciousness'.

The following story acts as a *replacement-miracle* for not getting any of the Weeping Angel's tears; and while it could be assessed as coincidental by sceptics, taken together with other serendipitous happenings it was seen by Mary as evidence of the way God worked in blessing the lives of those following *His Plan*. Such synchronicity between people, events and timing is seen by many contemporary spiritual seekers as the hallmark of being 'in tune with the universe'.

*For those who have not heard my story ... I met a woman at St Anne's Station, who, in five minutes acquaintance had taken me into her home & every form of loving care was lavished upon me. She met my every need for the whole time I was at St. Anne's, & refused to take a penny for it all.*

*Minna, the one who cared for me soon had her own convictions, for here was she, crying out for a real purpose in life & having an urge to do some "Martha Work" (her own words); while at the Centre, Joan was crying out for someone to do some "Martha Work". The dove-tailing of these minor miracles spells out their own convictions (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, August 1964, p. 2).*

## The Summit Lighthouse Convocation

Before recounting what Mary Broun later wrote about her time in Washington at the Summit Lighthouse Convocation, I want to explore the raw version of this part of Mary's story, recorded in a stand-alone, stop-press Supplement to the previous *Shalam Light* (July 1964, an issue which has been lost). Fred reports on what Mary has been doing by reprinting excerpts of a letter she wrote – which includes Fred's interspersed commentary. This text finishes with a homily from Fred about the value of aggressive righteousness, followed by humorous banter about Mary's more touristic experiences – which he sees as trivial and typically feminine. He begins:

*Dear Friends: – This is an effort to keep you reasonably up to date with the movement of your Ambassador – Mary... ’ (Robinson, in Supplement to Shalam Light, July 13<sup>th</sup> 1964, p. 1).*

The choice of the word 'Ambassador' immediately denotes the seriousness of Mary's undertaking as does the following: 'Mary finished her Mission in England and left to attend the Summit Lighthouse Conference – July 1–5 to which she felt an instant "Call"' (ibid.). Once again the words 'Mission' and 'Call' (always capitalised) place Mary as an envoy of Australia's New Age collective/movement. Fred name drops the Ascended Master who had sponsored the conference (on the *inner planes* of existence): 'It has been organised by St. Germain ...' (ibid.).

## Military Themes

After quoting some of the introduction to a channelling regarding the 'Holy Cause for the moment of Destiny' (ibid.), Fred made a special point of Saint Germain's sign-off line: 'Militantly I AM for the LIGHT' (ibid.). Fred's underlining of the word 'militantly' is telling. Like Mary he relished a spiritual battle. Considering their feeling for peace, pacifism and *Gandhian* philosophy, The Robinsons' use of militant themes and tropes may seem strange. However, the fact that the *Oahspe* book included many military metaphors, as did the channelling of some of the Ascended Masters from *The I AM Activity*, *The Bridge to Freedom*, and *The Summit Lighthouse*, seemed to legitimise

such belligerence for God. Many Evangelical Christian groups of today, employing similar militaristic language and imagery, are equally keen to ‘fight the good fight’.<sup>243</sup>

The following remarks, made in this 1964 supplement, are particularly important in understanding the intensity with which the Universal Brotherhood presented itself to both its own incoming Seekers and the rest of the Aquarian New Age movement’s peaceful and meditative participants of the 1970s:

*Quite obviously, as with El Morya & Kathumi, he [St. Germain] has no intention of being listed with the faint-hearted whom THE MASTER described so well in REV. Ch 3 v 16: “Because thou art lukewarm & neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth”. A very positive statement and no apologies made (Robinson, in Supplement to Shalam Light, July 1964, p. 1).*

Fred often used the word ‘positive’ to mean ‘active’ or ‘aggressive’, while using ‘negative’ to mean ‘receptive’ and ‘passive’ – a gendered binary of the spiritual life that privileges the male/positive pole. In the following two paragraphs Fred makes a particularly defining statement about this form of ‘positivity’ – one he turned into an art form:

*There is a positive, dynamic, evil force at large in the world (no, I have not mixed my terms. They know quite well what they want & have a very positive approach to getting it) deliberately & maliciously defying THE FATHER & ALL OF HIS WORKS (Robinson, in Supplement to Shalam Light, July 1964, p. 1).*

Here Fred was referencing the *Illuminati* or *Elders of Zion*, also known by the marginally less anti-Semitic terms of *Multinationals* or *Cabal of World Bankers*. This theme was always present in Fred’s philosophy, underpinning his world view – and based on his bitter personal experience of losing his farm. He was ‘positively’ looking forward to their comeuppance.

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<sup>243</sup> The phrase is gleaned from the Bible: ‘Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life ... (Timothy 6.12 (KJV)). The phrase was commonly used in the nineteenth-century, when those using it would have been well versed in Biblical texts. We know the line best through the Protestant hymn which begins: ‘Fight the good fight with all thy might; Christ is thy strength, and Christ thy right; Lay hold on life, and it shall be thy joy and crown eternally...’ (Monsell and Boyd 1863) (<http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/136600.html>, accessed 13.12.2010). I remember singing this song at our services; along with the lyrics of other Christian battle songs such as ‘Onward Christian Soldiers marching as to war’ (Sabine Baring-Gould 1865). This hymn’s theme is taken from New Testament references such as: “Thou shalt endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” (II Timothy 2:3, KJV) ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Onward\\_Christian\\_Soldiers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Onward_Christian_Soldiers), accessed 13.12.2010). That such lyrics were sung before or after intoning the Eastern ‘OM’ and saying Ascended Master ‘decrees’, is testimony to the spiritual eclecticism of the UBI – an attempt to cover all bases.

*It is long overdue for all would be Light Workers to recognise (as St. Germain & ALL the Hosts of Heaven do) that we can only restore the necessary balance to our Planet by an expression of LOVE as Positive & DYNAMIC in RIGHT ACTION as was expressed by Jesus when HE took a whip to clear the moneychangers out of The Temple, which they were desecrating. It was the only language they were capable of understanding (Robinson, in Supplement to Shalam Light, July 1964, p. 1).*

While Fred's intensity and great desire for whip-like action resonated with the strident and militant anti-war streak of the youth involved in the early 1970s Moratorium Marches against the Vietnam War, it was a decided *turn-off* for those involved in the quieter *cosmiccountercultural* settlers of Back-to-the-land movement. This group were often engaged in meditation – and more often than not smoking 'grass' to attain a state of '*desirelessness*', a word which made Fred's hackles rise.

### **The Hotel Room and Mary as a Tourist**

Having got this out of his system, and without Mary to restrain him, Fred went on to tell the story which had been the reason for producing this supplement:

*Mid-day, July 13<sup>th</sup>: A hold up in the mail from Washington, made it quite impossible to get this supplement out in the mail with SHALAM LIGHT as originally planned. A letter has just arrived giving some of her impressions of the gathering of the students, from all over the States, to the Summit Lighthouse Conclave (Robinson, in Supplement to Shalam Light, July 1964, p. 2).*

Fred provides a condensation of Mary's reactions to the five days of close association with Mark and Elizabeth Prophet at the Summit Light House Convocation in Washington DC: '*Dear Fred & Dora [a visitor to Shalam]: – Well, I seem to have fallen into the lap of luxury again. To start with I was horrified ...*' (Broun, in Supplement to *Shalam Light*, July 1964, p. 2). The short story is that the reservation Mary had made had not been registered and she was forced to accept a much more expensive room: '*I suppose they call it a "room" ... but it has its own bath, Toilet & room cupboards – radio TV and Telephone – just everything*' (ibid.). The cost was fourteen dollars and Mary had booked a room at six dollars; she wasn't going to pay more than double for their mistake. After a bath in this extravagant room, Mary attended the meeting in a '*rather strained*' state of mind, remarking that it had been '*20 hours since I got up out of my last bed*'. She commented that the '*address from Lord Maitreya was very interesting*'; and that Mark Prophet was '*a very unusual character, with a very unusual method*'. Much of the following text explained how she sorted out

the price of the room: ‘...after much wrangling it was finally agreed that I should have the apartment to myself for \$6 ... and that is where I am writing to you – I forgot to mention air conditioning also’ (Broun, in Supplement to *Shalam Light*, July 1964, p. 1).

At this point in Mary’s reprinted letter, Fred places the following text in brackets:

*(And here, in all fairness to all concerned I feel compelled to interject. Here I have been a whole week, holding up our Press, ever since she left London on July 1<sup>st</sup>, waiting for some really hot stop-press late news and then – casually sandwiched between having a hot bath & an unseemly wrangle to get a millionaire apartment at bargain rates – mention of the address by Lord Maitreya is dismissed with a sentence of 7 words. I gather that our intuition & imagination is expected to fill in the gaps. I don’t recall having such a clear cut example brought to my notice before of the feminine instinct for bargain hunting overriding all other considerations)* (Robinson, in Supplement to *Shalam Light*, July 1964, pp. 2–3).

Continuing in the same vein Fred admits that ‘after rereading her letter I find she does eventually get back to the “meat” we are looking for in this “sandwich”’ (ibid., p. 3). We learn that there were 50 people at the meeting, and that Lord Maitreya had said that some of the people at the meeting had ‘once lived on a planet named “EROS” & when EROS made its Ascension, some people were left behind’ (ibid.). Mary makes a jump in logic, connecting *Erosian* history with the *cosmic vibrational shift* and the Flying Saucer *lift-off* evacuation, believed to be around the cosmic corner here on Earth, at least in the Universal Link’s prophecy. Two of Mary’s observations here are surrounded by Fred’s bracketed interjections (marked by his identifying ‘Ed.’) in which he critiques Mary’s letter with his stream of consciousness commentary, focussing on Mary’s chatty tourist talk and her casual personal assessments:

*This adds up to what we have been saying about this Planet’s Ascension into the higher dimension (and then – off we go again, just as we thought some real nourishment was being ladled out – Ed. [Fred’s comment]).. Incidentally, my apartment window looks out at the Whitehouse [sic], which is only a few hundred yards away.*

*Friday 3rd: Yesterday was very interesting. A lecture (instruction) by Mark Prophet was very well done. He is a great Teacher – a great man – a conscious medium. I am beginning to like him. I think he is one of the great ones. Elizabeth, his wife, is very sweet – they have a young baby, Elizabeth. Elizabeth & Mark work very well, as a duality. Dictation last night was by El Morya. It is not the Whitehouse [sic] I see it is ‘The Capital’ (You can see quite clearly now what I mean can’t you. Ed.[Fred’s aside]) (Broun & Robinson, in Supplement to *Shalam Light*, July 1964, p. 3).*

Mary’s own spontaneous interjections about her room, with Fred’s comments about her commentary, reveal both a sense of humour and a relationship which clearly included a



lot of human fun – something which I witnessed as existing between them for almost all of the dozen years I was close to them. Surrounded, and sometimes totally engulfed, by the very serious positions they took, their sense of humour saves them from full-blown fanaticism – and this was also the case with the Universal Brotherhood. While we did take our lifestyle and our calling seriously, we were able to laugh at ourselves. In the following, Mary can be seen as a normal tourist in awe of her surroundings, but with a parochial predilection for home cooking:

*Washington is beautifully laid out. Spacious wide streets – room to breathe. Large white buildings, but beautiful Main Highways and beautiful “Avenues”. The rest of the streets are numbered one way with alphabet cross streets. Everything is easy to find except food – GOOD FOOD, that is; I’m sure I don’t know where they hide it – if they have any – plenty of rubbish, of course ... (Broun, in Supplement to Shalam Light, July 1964, p. 3).*

Fred may well have edited Mary’s tourist talk for he used a rare and correctly-used ellipsis to bring this section to a close.

### **Mark and Elizabeth Prophet**

Fred picks up Mary’s letter, with her description of Mark Prophet tailored to be read by the current members of the Shalam group in Perth:

*Mark Prophet is about our Hugh Gaubert’s build – not unlike Hugh – same eyes, but not so handsome as our Hugh. Mark has a strong chin, powerful, almost cruel looking, & yet a sensitivity which almost looks like weakness. He is very “Characteristic looking” (ibid., p. 3).*

Mary often assessed people she had just met using their facial features as the main indicator, as in physiognomy.<sup>244</sup> The related fields of phrenology and eugenics were, to some degree, always a part of the Robinsons’ schema, so that handsomeness and classical beauty were seen as indicating something about the qualities of a ‘soul’, and also thought to be ‘in the breeding’. Both Fred and Mary privileged ‘whiteness’ in line with their cultural inheritance. Having said this, Mary was always able to change her first impressions; she did not really want to judge books by covers. When she did, and

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<sup>244</sup> Physiognomy (from the Greek *Physis* meaning ‘nature’ and *gnomon* meaning ‘judge’ or ‘interpreter’) is the assessment of a person’s character or personality from their outer appearance, especially the face. Accepted by the ancient Greek philosophers, it fell into disrepute in the Middle Ages, to be revived in the nineteenth-century and falling from favour again in the twentieth-century. It is being revived again as some new research indicates that people’s faces can indicate such traits as trustworthiness, social dominance and aggression (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Physiognomy>, accessed 13.9.2011).

saw the unfairness of such judgment, Mary could admit that she had been wrong. In the above text, it is hard to fathom exactly what ‘characteristic looking’ actually means. Perhaps it meant that he had unusual, hard-to-read characteristics, including sensitivity – even if he did have a ‘cruel chin’ and was uglier than Hugh Gaubert. Besides looks, and stature, Mary often assessed people on the opinion she formed about the spiritual experiences they shared with her, often accepting people’s stories at face value:

*Mark told me himself that he has always been used by the Masters – even before he was conscious of the fact. I am hoping to have a longer talk with him. He is, of course, fairly tied up with the Convocation. He has a nice sense of humour and a good relationship with his group ... The more I see of Mark the more I am magnetically drawn to him. There is a simple goodness that shines forth in all that he does. In spite of his greatness there is no evidence of ego* (Broun, in Supplement to *Shalam Light*, July 1964, pp. 3–4).

Often in the Community Mary would make an equally glowing assessment of a visitor or Seeker, who had shared their psychic experiences with her. She would ring me and be very excited about ‘who we had here’. I sometimes found this annoying, particularly when they were given special treatment that exonerated them from the practical work needing to be done; but then these people were also sometimes seen as a threat to me and my own position in the social hierarchy of the Community.

Other extracts of Mary’s reprinted letter reveal her take on this New Age group, her openness to their suggestions, and her ability to know what worked for her:

*There is a young man conducting a ritual drama, from the Opera by Wagner, whom they say is an embodiment of Wagner – could be ... Last night the Goddess of Liberty spoke & christened the baby of Mark and Elizabeth. While the Decrees are well done & rhythmic, they are too strong for me – more powerful than The “I AM”<sup>245</sup> (Broun, in Supplement to *Shalam Light*, July 1964, p. 4).*

That Mary was on her own mission is made clear by the following text. She was not there to follow, but to observe, assess and absorb; and to further her idea of a ‘New Age Council of Unity’ between the groups, which she had been working on at Shalam:

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<sup>245</sup> The I AM Activity (itself an offshoot of Theosophy) is the major predecessor of the Church Universal and Triumphant/Summit Lighthouse, begun by Mark and Elizabeth Prophet. The I AM Activity was the first of the modern New Age NRMs to adopt the rhythmic group intoning of affirmations or ‘decrees’ as they called them, including adorations to God and invocations for abundance of every good thing, including love, money, peace, and happiness ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%22I\\_AM%22\\_Activity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%22I_AM%22_Activity), accessed 25.2.2010).

Sat. 4<sup>th</sup> July: I am getting to know more of the members now. I am finding them very interested in all I have to tell them. There seems to be a ready 'Soil' for the idea of co-ordination of all Groups. These people have come through enough groups to realise the Universality of what is taking place ...

The final session was excellent. Dictations by Djwal Kul, Michael & Kuthumi. After 3 years preparation Elizabeth made her initiation into Channelship. Rex, whose Ascension is mentioned in "the Magic Presence" spoke through her – she will make a good channel. I am trying to get the tape of Djwal Kul's address – it was very good. He spoke of the need for Light Workers to be models of perfection and not to excuse their errors by calling them "human". Also spoke of the need for a LOVE LINKED CHAIN – the Blockage lies with the Channels themselves – they are so fearful in protecting their little flock – they guard over them (Broun, in Supplement to *Shalam Light*, July 13th 1964, pp. 3–4).

Here Mary is referring directly to some of the channels she had been meeting on her mission, perhaps including the Summit Lighthouse channels, Mark and Elizabeth Prophet.<sup>246</sup> This is a telling observation that relates as much to the New Spiritual/Religious Movements of today, as it did then – and ironically but inevitably to the later Universal Brotherhood which Mary 'protected' fiercely. Mary continues to write glowingly of those at this convocation, happy to be the eclectic 'contrary Mary', in the face of critics who warned her against attending an event of the Summit Lighthouse:

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<sup>246</sup> The Summit Lighthouse was founded by Mark L. Prophet (1918–1973). Its beliefs reflect features of the traditions of both Theosophy and New Thought (Lewis & Melton 1994, pp. 1–2). Prophet had joined Max Heindel's Rosicrucian Fellowship in the 1940s, and had affiliated with Yogananda's Self-Realisation Fellowship, before taking instruction from Geraldine Innocente (founder of the *Ascended Master group* Bridge to Freedom), until forming Summit Lighthouse in 1958. Elizabeth Clare Prophet, née Wulf (1939–2009) had in early life been a Christian Scientist until in 1961 she commenced 'training' as a 'messenger' under Mark Prophet. They were married in 1963 and had four children. When Mark died, Elizabeth assumed leadership of their organisation, which began an interest in survivalism, based on instructions she said Mark gave her the night before his stroke. The Church Universal and Triumphant was founded in 1975 as the corporate parent of The Summit Lighthouse – the outreach group. The organisation gained media notoriety in the 1980s when Elizabeth Clare Prophet made predictions of an impending nuclear holocaust that was prophesied to occur on April 23, 1990. When these predictions failed to come true, Prophet reiterated her statements of impending doom. The group had stockpiled their shelter with military-grade weaponry, and members of the organisation were later arrested on federal weapons charges (Boyet 2005, pp. 53–56). Criticism of the church as a 'cult' was tempered by the academic study '*Church Universal and Triumphant in Scholarly Perspective*' (Lewis & Melton 1994) in which the negative stereotype of the group is rejected (pp. vii–xiv). In November 1998 Prophet was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. The leadership of the group subsequently passed to a board of directors. The current leadership has attempted to draw the focus of its work away from doomsday predictions. The stated mission of The Summit Lighthouse is to publish and apply the teachings of the Ascended Masters as taught by Mark and Elizabeth Clare Prophet ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Summit\\_Lighthouse#cite\\_note-snow-3](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Summit_Lighthouse#cite_note-snow-3); [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth\\_Clare\\_Prophet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_Clare_Prophet); [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church\\_Universal\\_and\\_Triumphant](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_Universal_and_Triumphant), accessed 13.9.2011).

*Some thought I was going into the “Lion’s Den” when I came here – What a lovely “Den”. To me this is as true as anything I have ever met up with – It is a great movement, doing a great work. I have met and mixed with the students and made many fine friends. Never have I met so many wonderful people all together in one place (ibid., p. 4).*

While Mary was delighted with the quality of the people, and the way they welcomed her, she was not there to visit people socially, or just to sit at the feet of ‘great channels’ like Mark Prophet and his protégée wife Elizabeth. Mary was becoming, if she wasn’t already, aware of the mission that *Shalam Light* could play as a unifying force on the world’s New Age stage:

*I have been well received and many have invited me to their homes, even Mark – but I won’t. Many have expressed a wish to be put on our mailing list. Mark wants me to write & tell him of my experiences – & of course I will. I feel I will have something worth saying by the time I get home. Am on my way to MARK-AGE.<sup>247</sup>*

*My Love to you all.*

*Mary (Love and Blessings from SHALAM Ed.) (Broun in Supplement to Shalam Light, July 13<sup>th</sup> 1964, p. 4).*

The very last line at the bottom of the supplement I have been quoting from was written in Fred’s handwriting, probably written on each of the copies just before he posted them and left for Melbourne to pick up Mary. It reads: ‘*I’m on my way. We should be back by end of July – Fred*’ (Robinson, in Supplement to *Shalam Light*, July 13<sup>th</sup> 1964, p. 4).

## **Mary’s Official Version of her Mission**

It is interesting to observe how Mary’s reworked and more considered, even politically correct version of the Summit Lighthouse Convocation, as part of her around-the-world story, is played out in the August 1964 edition of *Shalam Light*, which continued from the St Annes and the English tour descriptions already covered. This text was as much written for the New Age channels Mary had been visiting as it was for the *Shalam Light*

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<sup>247</sup> Mark-Age Inc. is a non-profit spiritual-educational organisation founded in 1960. The Mark-Age group believes it has

been commissioned by the Hierarchal Board to implant a prototype of spiritual government on Earth: The I Am Nation. The I Am Nation is a government of, for and by the I Am Selves of all people on Earth, regardless of race, religion, gender, age, nationality or spiritual-group affiliation. It is not a political government, but is a spiritual congregation of all souls who seek to serve God, first and foremost, and the I Am Selves of all people on Earth (<http://www.thenewearth.org/markage.html>, accessed 24.3.2010).

Australian readership – the selected readers of the unofficial, supplementary edition in which Fred highlighted Mary’s informal letter, just covered.

Mary was clearly conscious that what she said about each (rival) Light Centre would come under the close scrutiny of the likes of Mark Prophet. Unlike Fred’s hotchpotch editing layout, and his *sock-it-to-them* intensity, counterpointed by casual and flippant comments, as in Fred’s Supplement, Mary’s story of her overseas pilgrimage is double spaced for easy reading, while also being a model in diplomacy. No ‘cruel chins’ or ‘characteristic looking’ clumsy phrases appear here. Having said this, there were still a few inappropriate word choices in this text:

*THE SUMMIT LIGHTHOUSE CONVOCATION at Washington D.C. proved to be a Spiritual Feast indeed. Five days I spent here, with about 50 students from all over the U.S.A., I was pleasantly surprised at the open mindedness of the Students, for they have grown out of the narrow group attitude of mind to the more Universal approach of the “Family of GOD”.*

*Mark and Elizabeth Prophet I see as great Souls, come to do a job & getting on with it to the utmost of their capacity. Much love & much power was generated at this gathering of dedicated souls.*

*A feeling of Oneness – of ‘belonging’ – was very much in evidence. Many wonderful dictations came from our Beloved Masters, thro’ Mark (A conscious Channel). Later, when a full script report comes to hand we hope to give extracts of the Talks that came through, but here I wish to refer only to the one that came from our Beloved Djwal Kul, and, in my own words, it went something like this: A conference of Masters was held & El Morya was all for giving the students of Light some “Home Truths”. But Lord Maitreya felt this was a little severe, & so it was given to Djwal Kul to convey to the Students of Light what the complaint was all about: Concern was felt that the students were freely excusing their faults & failings by calling them “just Human”. It was now expected of the Students of Light that they be “Models of Perfection” (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, August 1964, pp. 2–3).*

This theme of ‘models of perfection’ was taken up by Mary during the shaping of the Universal Brotherhood, and the training of us ‘just human’ *New Agers*. Mary applied

what she believed was expected of those who had accepted *the mantle of Light and volunteered to become part of the cosmic operation as a ground crew of the Ascended Masters*; but most of us really weren't up for it. Mary saw it as her responsibility to 'polish our souls' for the 'Great Work' we would be 'called upon' to perform – and that is just what she attempted. Fred was much softer. Fred's bark was worse than Mary's bite. In contrast Mary's bite was unaccompanied by much barking. She certainly made mistakes, but was never calculatingly or deliberately vicious – even if she was fiercely protective of the Universal Brotherhood, which she sometimes described as '*my baby*' (pers. comm., 1970s).

Back in the 1960s, Mary's mission was to foster 'Group Unity'. She was always looking for unifying themes within the channelled messages of other groups – and she found them:

*He [Djwal Kul through Mark Prophet] spoke of the need for A LINK OF LOVE BETWEEN THE GROUPS. Many lovely friendships I made in this corner of the world – but now I must go on (Broun, in Shalam Light, August 1964, p. 3).*

It is important to understand the *elephant-in-the-room* of this text. Many of the groups Mary visited were involved in what could be called *inter-cultic warfare*, where these New Age New Religious Movements competed for legitimacy. I remember Mary telling me about her trip, and being an 'envoy of unity' (pers. comm., 1972). She felt she needed to act as a peacemaker and trouble shooter between these almost warring groups, handling gossip and parochial egotism as wisely as she could. The tenor of the story bears this out as she recalls visits to other centres such as the Mark-Age Meta-Centre, founded by El Morya-Mark and Nada-Yolanda.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> El Morya-Mark (a.k.a. Charles Boyd Gentzel, 1922–1981) was a research chemist by education and training (A.B., Cornell University, 1949). He also had held various sales and promotional positions. In 1949 he received the name Mark-Age, thinking it would apply to an international sales organisation he would form; the name was a shortened form of *Marketing Agents*. The spiritual nature of Mark-Age was revealed after his own sudden spiritual awakening. In 1955 he began avidly studying metaphysics, especially the works of Thomas Troward and Charles Fillmore (contributors to the New Thought and Unity School of Christianity). He also became keenly interested in UFOs and researched the fascinating claims of prominent space contactees. Gentzel wrote a number of texts, including his major work, *How To Do All Things: Your Use of Divine Power* (1965). After his death in 1981 he was believed to be guiding light workers such as El Morya, Chohan of the First Ray of Will and Power.

## The Mark-Age Meta-Centre

Mary, having just been to the Summit Light House's Convocation, was now placed in the interesting position of moving from one centre to another as Australia's unaligned New Age ambassador, even inspector. Each channel clearly received her cordially, perhaps trying to be seen as the most magnanimous channel, yet at the same time pointing out the unfortunate weaknesses in the other channels and their corresponding movements. It is easy to see how such jealousies were forming in this New Age 'world within a world' – and no doubt still are.

Memory suggests that the Summit Lighthouse and the Mark-Age Meta-Centre were not quite 'unified' in their perspectives. Conversations I had with Mary about her American tour, suggested that Mark and Elizabeth Prophet of Summit Lighthouse and *El Morya-Mark* and *Nada-Yolanda* of the Mark-Age Meta Centre were failing to see eye-to-eye, or even speak to each other about the messages coming through them; sometimes being openly antagonistic. Here is Mary's positive report on the Mark-Age group and their two founding channels:

*MIAMI, Florida was my next Port of Call. MARK-AGE Meta-Center welcomed me with open arms. Big Brother Mark & The Motherly Heart of Yolanda was a joy, most easy to take. Gladly would I have stayed longer with these delightful Souls than the day & a half appointed, had not my invisible conductor advised of the necessity to move on, as*

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Nada-Yolanda (a.k.a. Pauline Sharpe, 1925–2005) moved to Miami in 1953, after working in New York in various aspects of show business. She had a spiritual awakening in 1956, after joining a psychic development class to understand and explore her newfound talents; here she was exposed to interdimensional channelling, and space contactees. In 1958 she received her first telepathic communication, via automatic writing, gradually being introduced to ascended masters from the invisible realms such as Paul the Apostle (Hilarion), John the Beloved (Kut Humi), Mother Mary (Sol-O-Man), Jesus of Nazareth (Sananda). She did not go into trance but remained conscious during the communication. Her method of automatic writing was supplanted by vocally channelled communications in 1960. Basic information was revealed on metaphysics, the Latter Days, and the Second Coming. Many of her communications were for personal guidance; her spiritual teachers promising that they would send a scientist to work with her.

On December 1, 1959, the 'scientist' arrived. Mark met Yolanda and they began to share their spiritual ideas and manuscripts, discovering numerous correlations in one another's 'receivings'. In 1960 they officially made the spiritual covenant with Christ Jesus to begin Mark-Age operations. According to the Mark-Age website, Nada-Yolanda's books are considered the preeminent texts internationally for spiritual Self-development. After her 'transition' in 2005 she is believed to function as Nada of the Karmic Board, Co-Chohan (with Sananda/Jesus) of the Seventh Ray of Love and Peace, and in interdimensional teamwork with El Morya and Sananda, she is said to inspire Mark-Age operations for the Second Coming (<http://www.thenewearth.org/mahtmarkyolanda.html>, accessed 24.3.2010).

*planned; & looking back I can now see the wisdom of this guidance. My whole Tour was indeed “Conducted”. Few dreams I had but each was a specific guidance (Broun in Shalam Light, August 1964, p. 4).*

This was a piece of diplomatic writing. Mary subtly calls attention to the mutually good motives of each of the groups. She was certainly not taking sides.

*Because of the shortness of my stay, Mark & Yolanda gave me of their precious time – took me swimming in the Atlantic (Beaut.) & a sight-seeing Tour around the delightful Palm Tree Holiday Resort. Kindly Ken it was, who met me at the Airport & returned me to my Plane....Mangoes, Pancakes & Salads – memories of the Meta-Center. . My home across the Seas – my kind of Folk (Broun, in Shalam Light, August 1964, p. 3).*

## **Teaching the Teachers**

Here Mary pauses to reflect on her writing, underscoring the sincerity and depth of meaning in what she is writing. Was this a message to her hosts back in America who had become enmeshed in jealousy and rivalry? There is some of this in Mary’s last sentence of the following paragraph, where she writes about the privilege she felt when reflecting upon her experiences with the groups she had just visited. Her writing works for both her hosts’ consumption, and for those who are following her New Age pilgrimage:

*What one experiences one KNOWS. . . These words you are reading are but words. . . How can I make them real? To LIVE among these people, even for a short space of time is an Experience, & what one Experiences one KNOWS. . . How privileged I feel at this moment for the memories of those Experiences (Broun, in Shalam Light, August 1964, p. 4).*

This little interlude of teaching /pleading/exhorting was a consistent part of Mary’s practice in the later Universal Brotherhood Community; especially so when linked to her dreams and guidance. That which *came through her* as a spiritual experience, was seen as something she ‘KNEW’ – a conviction on which she could rarely be budged. When in this manner she decided on a course of action, she set about convincing others that it was right – relentlessly. She recognised this and said, ‘as a Cancer I am a crab’



(conversations 1970s).<sup>249</sup> The times of such impasse were difficult. It was easy for those who sat on the sidelines of the decision making process, or just went along with it, to see the CentreCore members as ‘pawns’, completely under Mary’s influence. How members of a board, synod, caucus or cabinet handle the powerful convictions of their founders/leaders/ministers/prime ministers, while beyond the scope of this history, is a question that this study highlights. The issues involved are especially problematic in the domain of New Religious Movements, which have idealistic underpinnings, and high expectations of creating equitable structures. By telling the personal stories of visionary founders/leaders with respect and fairness, it is possible to appreciate the complexities surrounding the decisions made and the often fraught relationships with co-workers.

Certainly Mary attempted to understand the channels she was meeting on her pilgrimage cum mission. She wanted *to experience the vibrations of these God knowing channels*. Her focus was on the positive contributions she saw *being outworked in each Centre of Light*. Her task was to *glean the unique truths these mystics had brought through*. Her mission, as a peacemaker, was to *harmonise the aspects of truth* each Light Centre was contributing, while encouraging a tolerant attitude regarding their *seeming conflicts of truth* and their dissonant *modus operandi*. Mary’s goal was to incorporate the most useful teachings she encountered into the schema that she and Fred were developing – best described as *The Laws of Life and How to Live Them* (the title of a booklet she later published).

By the time of her survey of International New Age Light Centres and Channels, Mary believed that she was *being used by God*, or as she alternatively put it, *playing her part in God’s Plan*. An awareness of some future but as yet unknown work was developing; something which both she and Fred felt *God had in store* for them; something which they thought involved the younger generation of New Agers. Mary thus saw this journey as a preparation, an adventure within the longer adventure of *doing the Father’s Will* as it

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<sup>249</sup> Quoting from an Astrological website: ‘Cancer is the Fourth Sign of the Zodiac. Its name derives from the Latin “*cancer*”, literally “the crab.” Cancer individuals are “tried and true.” They tend to cling to tradition as though they were a part of it, yet their moods and even their purposes may become as changeable as this Sign’s ruling celestial body...the Moon. Thus, such self-contradiction is understandable, given that it is part of the Cancer person’s innate nature’ (<http://www.novareinna.com/constellation/cancer.html>, accessed 24.3.2010).

became apparent day by day. Fred often repeated the phrase ‘*When you hitch your wagon to a star you are bound to get a little breathless*’;<sup>250</sup> Mary had by now fully experienced what this meant. This self-proclaimed ‘country housewife’, by following *God’s Plan*, found herself in the home of the people she so much enjoyed; and meeting the Channels who were the celebrities of the New Age.

### **Ethera of Hollywood**

Moving on to Los Angeles, Mary’s main connection was with Ethera Prins, with whom she corresponded throughout the 1960s, reprinting many of her channelled messages:

*I was met at Los Angeles by Ethera, the channel for “The Light that Must not Fail” ... I stayed four days with Ethera & her two lovely daughters, at their home in Beverly Hills, Hollywood... Ethera’s original home was on an Organic Garden – & this she loved, but, because of the work she had to do she was guided to this home in Beverly Hills. There is a lovely relationship between Ethera and her daughters, Eileen, 15 years old & Ruth 9 years, & the Love that radiates thro’ this Home creates an atmosphere of Peace (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, August 1964, p. 5).*

Mary evidently had an especially strong relationship with Ethera Prins, for in the early days of our association, I remember her talking about Ethera more often than any of the other channels. The following text, produced *raised-eye-browed-scepticism* when recounted out of the context of the miraculous happenings said to be occurring around New Age channels, but was to Mary simply more proof of the veracity of Ethera’s messages:

*The High light of this visit (to me) was the way in which Ethera receives her messages...Both Jesus & St Germain employ a little bird each. When a gentle little bird comes chirping at the window, Ethera says “Oh, there is Jesus, I must go to the typewriter”, & there she consciously types a message from Jesus...when St. Germain wishes to dictate, he uses a very chirpy little bird...But, when The Father, JEHOUAH*

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<sup>250</sup> The proverb ‘Hitch your wagon to a star’ is attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) in his essay ‘American Civilisation’ (*The Atlantic Monthly*, 1862). It recommends that one aspires to great things; and not to set pessimistic goals. Fred’s addition suggests what will happen to a person who has permanently hitched their wagon to a star. To Fred, during the early 1970s, the *New Age* promise was seen as an exciting adventure on a *star-wagon* – bound to make those who hitched themselves to it *a little breathless*.

[the *Etherian* spelling] comes, anyone else in the house must be put to sleep because His vibrations are too high...this I experienced twice. In each case an overwhelming feeling of sleepiness came over me & in seconds I was asleep (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, August 1964, p. 5).

### **Fred Brooks and the Desert Lands**

As if Mary had been recounting something quite ordinary she continues her travel story without missing a beat:

*While with Ethera we visited Fred Brooks, at Morongo Valley, near Palm Springs, about 100 miles inland. I stayed a full day with the Brooks. We have corresponded with Fred for some time & I feel it a privilege to have met and talked with this great man of philosophical WISDOM. . . Mature of years, yet with an open heart that refuses to age he is ever ready to change and grow as Truth is revealed to the mind of man. Among other things Fred Brooks is an artist, & his lovely home is decorated with beautiful paintings of the surrounding hills.*

*It was hot while I was there, but I had the feeling that I would like to return when the snow was on the mountaintops. . . This desert land has a beauty all its own, & in my heart of hearts a little place is kept for the memories of this delightful visit (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, August 1964, pp. 5–6).*

The romantic sentiments expressed here are a good example of the nature-loving, sentimental side of Mary, also apparent in her visionary writings during the life of the Universal Brotherhood. Mary did appreciate traditional art and beauty, and knew there was much that she did not comprehend in the cultural domain. One side of her nature seemed to crowd out the artistic cultural aspects of life, while the spiritual and moral side was suspicious of the sophistry of artistic ambiguity and irony. While Mary did not wish to thwart genuine artistic endeavour in the later Community, she felt the arts – under the thrall of what she called ‘*The Worlds Freedom Philosophy of growing licence*’ – attempted to legitimise ‘the bad’, ‘the false’, and ‘the ugly’, in an ungodly effort to undermine ‘the good’, ‘the true’ and ‘the beautiful’. Self-discipline and societal-censorship were thus key defences against this aspect of the *World-wide Conspiracy* against *true values*.

## Gabriel Green and U.F.O. International

The following record of Mary's meeting with Gabriel Green <sup>251</sup> is an interestingly independent observation which consciously contradicts Fred's constant assertions that it was *impossible to stay balanced in the big cities of the world*.

*On returning to Los Angeles, Ethera, the girls & I called in on Gabriel Green, of The U.F.O. International. Here we were cordially welcomed by Gabriel & his lovely young wife. And here I was impressed by an attitude which was striking because of its setting.*

*As I said before I was living in a world within a world, & therefore not having much to do with everyday happenings of the outer world. However, mass emotions have their way of intruding into the feelings & the affairs of men. . . . I was only a couple of hours with Gabriel Green, but here in the heart of Los Angeles I found, what seemed to me, to be stability unaffected by the emotions of the masses. . . . An independent, Universal approach to man & his affairs, and this I found very refreshing.*

*Altho' I have not had the time to read much from the Journal of The U.F.O. International, I understand that this group were given knowledge with which to build an instrument with which they are now seeing & communicating (T.V. & Radio style) with the physical senses, with our friends from Outer Space. You will be getting extracts from these journals in SHALAM LIGHT (Broun, in Shalam Light, August 1964, pp. 6-7).*

While research into this communication invention is beyond the scope of this thesis, it seems safe to assume that the instrument has not been highly successful in using television or radio to communicate with the *Space People*.

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<sup>251</sup> Gabriel Green (1924-2001) was among the least well-known of the classic 1950s contactees: individuals who claimed to have met and talked with friendly human-looking Space Brothers from other planets, and to have ridden in their spacecraft. He claimed to have graduated with a PhD in physics from UC Berkley in 1953, and to have made several important contributions to the Standard Model of elementary particles, but his actual educational background seems to have been acquired at Woodbury Business College in Los Angeles. He founded the California-based *Amalgamated Flying Saucer Clubs of America, Inc.* in 1957, at approximately the same time he announced his meeting with flying saucer crewmen from the hitherto unknown planet *Korender*, orbiting the triple star Alpha Centauri. In 1960 he ran for the U.S. Presidency claiming to represent the Universal Flying Saucer Party, and to base his political philosophy on 'United World Universal Economics'. In 1967 he published his only book, *Let's Face Facts about Flying Saucers*. In 1972 he ran again for US president, collecting fewer than 200 votes ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabriel\\_Green](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabriel_Green), accessed 25.2.2010).

## **‘Linking Up’ in San Francisco**

This trip was important to Fred Robinson too, for it cemented personal links developed since he first began seeking in the 1930s. One of these links was with then current publisher of one of Fred’s first sources of *Modern Revealed Knowledge*. Mary’s account reveals how like-minded communicants can experience deep friendships without ever having met:

*San Francisco was my next port of call, to the Home of Watson M. Connor & his charming wife Rae. It was Watson who published the last edition of “THE HISTORY OF THE ORIGIN OF ALL THINGS” as well as a number of other publications of a high spiritual content. Fred has been corresponding with Watson for some years now & so it was like meeting with an old friend. Meeting with like-minded people does away with formalities & strain of any kind. There is immediately a “Home from home” atmosphere & it was this “Linking Up” with THE FAMILY OF GOD that made the trip around the world one of pleasurable enjoyment. Many other Centers I would have liked to make contact with had time permitted. Watson radiates a Spirit of Selfless Service. Humility & greatness shine forth from this lovely Soul, & another friendship was cemented (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, August 1964, p. 7).*

Mary’s phrase ‘shines forth from this lovely soul’ is a good example of the generational linguistic disconnect between the Robinsons and my generation, who may have described Watson M. Conner as having ‘cool out-there vibes’.

## **Mrs Balz the Spiritual Mother**

The links made through the already existing New Age network from geographically isolated Perth were remarkable. People guided to make links develop into contacts that have meaning:

*Rae Connor kindly drove me several miles to visit a Mrs. Balz, who had been guided to send me a piece of her music, when I was searching Perth, a few weeks ago for such music, although we had no previous contact. . . Here I found a woman demonstrating the “Spiritual Mother”, a need which we had recently come to realise would be more and more in demand. A sweet & lovely Soul, elderly, but very radiant was Mrs. Balz, composing Music from the Spheres & teaching it to 25 young pupils. . The magnetic*

*attraction this gentle Soul has for her pupils is such that they will not leave her, even when they have learned all she can teach them.*

*Here is an example for all who are concerned with the New Age Children... Many New Age Souls now being born on to our Planet are of such a high and sensitive nature that they are going to need more love & understanding than their natural mothers can be expected to cope with... This is where “The Spiritual Mother” can supplement the natural Mother by supplying Spiritual needs... This is what Mrs. Balz is doing naturally without any thought or realisation of why the children are so attracted to her (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, August 1964, pp. 7–8).*

This understanding was clearly important to Mary, and perhaps reflects a desire to be a Mrs Balz: a warm, caring and magnetic ‘spiritual mother’. While Mary could be very kind, loving and understanding, she did not naturally radiate warmth. She wasn’t a large, loving, enveloping and openly friendly type of person; on the contrary she was thin, short, and had her mind focused on issues, ideas and principles.

### **The Unification Church in California**

Mary was open to the New Religious Movements of the period, as well as the New Spiritual Movements and the New Age Channelling Groups (which usually had no desire to become a religion). Her contact with the Unification Church of Sun Myung Moon is an interesting documentation of the way this group was perceived before it became cast as a suspect ‘cult’ and a controversial religious force. Mary had been in touch with the group via the Universal Link, which had recognised Rev. Sun Myung Moon as being someone special. Anthony Brooks referred to him as being ‘on the Christ Ray’.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> The following is a 1960s New Age perspective on the founder and leader of this now well-established NRM:

Sun Myung Moon took earthly form in Korea in 1920 and after Jesus had appeared to him when he was 16 years old he accepted his own unique mission in relation to the “Second Coming” and he founded what he called the Unification Church of World Christianity. After spending a month in Korea as his guest, I can myself testify to the remarkable revelations which come to those who are attuned to him. It seems to me that because Sun Myung Moon is incarnate upon the earth at this time and has a particular link with the Christ Ray, he makes an indispensable bridge for many people who are being given exceptional and life changing experiences by taking his powerful name into their meditations (from Anthony Brooke’s *Towards Human Unity*, 1976; on-line at <http://www.euro-tongil.org/swedish/english/ebrooke.htm#i1>, accessed 25.2.2010).

Mary Broun was indeed remarkably intrepid and perhaps even brave in the way she sought contact with such an eclectic range of strange religious and spiritual organisations:

*While I was with the Connors I made contact with The Unification Church, founded by Sun MYONG MOON of Korea, with its Headquarters now in San Francisco. It was here, in contact with these young emissaries of the Unification Church, that I first began to realise the purpose of my guided Tour around the World.*

*These people spoke of UNITY – of THE FAMILY OF GOD, & the need to claim our rightful heritage & BE a member of that FAMILY OF GOD. They spoke of the Power generated by the conscious awareness of our rightful place in the scheme of things; of the need to purify BODY, MIND & SOUL, & of the value of Fasting. Yes – I felt very much in tune with The Unification Church; but you will be getting extracts from their Book “Divine Principles” in future issues of Shalam Light.<sup>253</sup> To us at SHALAM it is a most significant “Sign of The Times” in which we now live that a Korean should found a Church in the United States to Unify the Christian Churches. The founder, Sun Myong Moon, has formed a strong Spiritual Link with The Universal Link in Lancashire & New Zealand (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, August 1964, p. 8 & cont. p. 13).*

Mary’s spiritual adventurism and religious eclecticism were to become enshrined in the life of the Universal Brotherhood. Far from being insular, exclusive and cut off from the world’s other religious and spiritual movements and influences, we often invited representatives of mainstream and marginal religious organisations prepared to come and share *their truths* with us. The word ‘Universal’ was taken quite seriously – and a unifying attitude was sought. While this was a plus in many ways, in that it kept us open to other ways of thinking, it also caused a lot of problems and confusion too – for we did not have a very well worked out belief system; and that which we did have was shot through with inconsistencies. While this was not a problem for Fred and Mary, not too many people can hold a number of conflicting concepts within their *belief world* at the

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<sup>253</sup> Rev. Moon’s book *Divine Principle* was first published in 1966. An English translation was not published until 1973 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divine\\_Principle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divine_Principle), accessed 13.11.2011). That the group was prepared to share excerpts for publication in *Shalam Light* from 1964 onwards, reveals how connected and respected Mary Broun-Robinson was within the Unification Church. While Moon’s text was never taken up by the UBI as a teaching text, Mary continued to respect this group, remaining sceptical of the press reports which depicted the group as a menacing ‘cult’ known as ‘the Moonies’.

one time, and live comfortably, especially when cohesive world views are being presented by other visiting organisations. A number of people ended up joining the groups that came to share their truths with the UBI. Unlike Fred and Mary, most Members needed consistent beliefs. But Mary's *spiritual butterfly* collecting and pollinating practices were always to define the Community – just as they had defined Shalam and Mary's early life. Fred would never have gone investigating all these groups – he already had enough truth worked out when he met Mary.

## **New Zealand and the Heralds of the New Age**

While Shalam came to be seen as the New Age Information Centre for Australia, it is also fair to say that its influence in New Zealand during the 1960s was considerable. Via the following commentary on her trip (which circled back to New Zealand), Mary is placed as the *Australian Link* in the Universal Link – and as a discerner of channels:

*From San Francisco I flew to the headquarters of The Heralds of The New Age, at Auckland, where I spoke to two groups of about 15 students each. May Harvey is to be congratulated for the wonderful spiritual work she is doing in New-Zealand.<sup>254</sup> A high standard of Spiritual development exists amongst the students & many are developing extra-sensory perception. A number of Channels are receiving dictations of a high order. I was particularly impressed by the sterling qualities of VERITY...a beautiful Soul in a Beautiful Woman (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, August 1964, p. 13).*

The above text is noteworthy for a couple of reasons beyond the facts of her stay there. Firstly, it is misleading to use the term 'headquarters' in regard to the Heralds of the New Age. Perhaps there were more people involved in the 1960s, but when I visited Verity in Auckland in the early 1980s (after attending a New Age Conference in the North Island town of Taupo) she had been running this organisation from her home, and almost by herself, for a number of years. Secondly, Mary's assessment of 'a high

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<sup>254</sup> Sutcliffe (2003) in his research on the genealogy of 'the small group spirituality' centred in the northern hemisphere and finding its New Age flowering in Findhorn, mentions a southern hemisphere example of similar New Age activity:

... a small group calling themselves the 'Heralds of the New Age' began in 1956 under the leadership of May Harvey. The Heralds brought together familiar elements of mediumship, healing, piety, UFO lore and a syncretic cosmology of 'Masters' and planes of existence. Their fortnightly meetings in Auckland began with a 'universal prayer for world peace'; May Harvey would then give a lecture and initiate discussion ... The Heralds' favoured 'sensitives' would also record messages from various discarnate sources and publish these in regular bulletins (Sutcliffe 2003, p. 74).



standard of Spiritual development' amongst the students she spoke with is based solely on her short experience of having them in her audience on one or two occasions. Mary was, in my experience, prone to making assessments of individuals or groups, depending on how they received her. Did the person or group *harmonise vibrationally* with her? If they did, they were described as being of a high standard of spirituality. While this kind of evaluation is perhaps a natural human tendency, it was unhelpful in the later development of the Universal Brotherhood.

## **The Duet in Melbourne**

Mary flew directly from Auckland to Melbourne, where she met Fred. They spoke together from the platform in Melbourne and Adelaide on their way back to Perth. During the early 1970s, while on lecture tours speaking to my generation, Fred and Mary often shared the stage together as a 'duet'; a successful strategy. They complemented one another in many ways and in a variety of domains. Mary would help to bring Fred back on track, and make some useful practical contributions. In the production of *Shalam Light* they also worked as a duet:

*Fred met me at the Melbourne Airport (exactly 4 weeks after my departure from Perth) & there I gladly handed over to him the rest of the itinerary. And now it just occurs to me, I think I'll let him finish this report (Broun, in Shalam Light, August 1964, p. 13).*

Here Fred seamlessly took over the writing of this report. The Robinsons' spontaneous commentary on their in-process writing lent freshness to many of the *Shalam Light* editorials – almost always much more engaging than the reprinting of the often interminable channelling of the Ascended Masters' instructions to humanity. The Robinsons' partnership in the writing, publishing and distribution of *Shalam Light* is a fascinating study in its own right. Their mixture of spirituality and practicality, seriousness and frivolity, put together without real concern for conventions, makes a browse through the extant copies of *Shalam Light* a pleasurable stroll in a countercultural museum – and sometimes an extraterrestrial zoo. Here in Melbourne in 1964 they first began practising their 'duet' platform strategy, which became part of their presentation of the UBI Community from 1972 onwards:

*Because of a mistake on the part of one of the officials of the Airport we were not expecting Mary until night time; so a meeting had been arranged for the afternoon at the home of our old friend R.C.M. Searby & we were just about to leave for his home when Hugh Rose announced that Mary was on the phone. So as soon as she landed in AUSTRALIA she was whisked off to a meeting & it was there we began the practice of our "DUET" in earnest (Robinson, in Shalam Light, August 1964, p. 14).*

## **Sydney Cadman**

While in Melbourne for this week in the second half of July 1964 the Robinsons held a number of these *duet meetings*. They also spent time with Fred's last spiritual teacher, Sydney Cadman – an enigmatic character who left nothing behind him except memories.<sup>255</sup>

*A meeting was held every day of our 7 days in Melbourne, sometimes two, but the important thing, for us, was the culmination of Mary's Tour with both of us being invited to spend a day with Syd. Cadman at his new Ashram. I, of course, had worked with him in Queensland but this was the first time Mary had met him in the flesh. Her impression was 'A great Soul with a great Teaching, hiding behind a brusque exterior in a Soul of Selfless Service – one of the conscious Administrators of "THE FAMILY OF GOD" – not easy to know but once glimpsed by the "inner eye" captivates the heart' (Broun, quoted in Robinson, in Shalam Light, August 1964, p. 14).*

Being the New Age 'ambassador' for Australia had given Mary the confidence to make such snappy *soul-assessments*. As I have said, Mary's instant evaluations are not something which I think were helpful in the later community, for while she did sometimes allow for complexity of character, as she has here with the '*great Soul*' Sydney Cadman, even the nuances of his character are defined in simplistic terms. A *black-and-white* and *good-and-bad* binary approach to some aspects of her thinking made it difficult for Mary to appreciate some of the more subtle tones of the personalities of the young people who came to the Community – it was as if she

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<sup>255</sup> My best efforts at researching Cadman have come to very little so far. I know he wrote and self-published a book, *The Perfect Language*, in the 1950s or early '60s, but have not been able to trace it. I do have a copy of his Death Certificate which revealed that Cadman had no living relatives and was buried at the State of Victoria's expense. As with Ione Long, no surviving letters, photographs or relatives of Cadman seem to exist; but as an influence he was occasionally acknowledged as '*my second teacher, and, like Ione, Syd was an Initiate*' (Fred Robinsons, pers. comm., 1971).

occasionally suffered from tonal-blindness when assessing people. Mary did however, faithfully, and without guile, share what she saw, experienced and intuitively ‘KNEW’.

Their time in Melbourne with Syd Cadman was clearly of personal *bonding-value* to Mary and Fred:

*It was here that the information was volunteered that Mary & I are Twin Ray Souls drawn together for the carrying out of a specific work. . . We had felt that this was so, from the beginning but it was very satisfying to get confirmation from such a knowledgeable source, for, as most of our readers know, Syd. is what I call a “Qualified Teacher” who employs “The Perfect Language” to convey First-hand Knowledge (Robinson, in Shalam Light, August 1964, p. 14).*

*Twin Soul and Soul Mate* information was much sought after in those early days of *New-Age soul-speculation*. While today talk of twin souls is a New Age cliché, often met with a ho-hum and a giggle; to the Robinsons in 1964, Cadman’s confirmation was seen as an important verification of their feelings and belief that they had been *brought together* for a greater purpose. Not only did such information justify Mary living at Shalam with Fred (a moral dilemma for her); but it also freed Fred of his emotional tie to Ione, his first *beloved teacher*, allowing him to contemplate legitimately breaking his lifetime vow of celibacy as *Brother Fred*, of the Rosicrucian Order of the Aquarians. In any case, they had been given a ‘*qualified message*’ that they were on the right track, were following the ‘Plan’, and doing God’s work as part of a *selfless-service oriented ground crew for the cosmic operation being planned from on high*:

*This day, spent with him, was the last major link in the Chain of Loving Understanding & Appreciation that Mary had been welding together around the English speaking World. For the rest of our stay we contacted as many New-Age students as were possible, doing what we could to draw them together in closer bonds of Love & Understanding. The Love that was showered upon us where we were staying & where ever we visited are memories that can never be erased (Robinson, in Shalam Light, August 1964, p. 15).*

Sydney Cadman died the week Fred and Mary returned to Perth, just after they had written the above, but in time to include the following poetic tribute as a dedication

page in the front of this August edition of *Shalam Light*. Written in capital letters, with a stencilled drawing of a lily on the top right hand side, it is an example of Mary's nostalgic *religiospiritual* poetic writing.

**TO OUR BROTHER SYD.**

OUR HEARTS STOOD STILL AWHILE TODAY  
AS THE LETTER (JUST ARRIVED) WAS READ,  
SYD. CADMAN, OUR FRIEND & TEACHER  
HAS PASSED TO HIS RELEASE.

FINISHED IS HIS WORK AMONG THE HUMAN KIND;  
BURDENED BY THE COMMON CLAY AND LITTLE UNDERSTOOD,  
BUT LOVED AND REVERENCED BY THOSE WHO KNEW HIM WELL.

A DEEP AND HUMBLE SOUL WAS HE;  
A WISDOM FAR BEYOND THE AVERAGE MIND,  
BUT A TEACHING SO CLEAR AND SIMPLE  
AS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF ALL WHO LONG TO LEARN.

MAY WE BE GIVEN STRENGTH AND WISDOM  
TO CARRY ON THE WORK THAT HE BEGAN.  
GOD BE WITH YOU BROTHER SYD.  
THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE TO US HUMBLE FOLK.

FARE THEE WELL, DEAR LONELY HEART,  
OUR HEARTS ARE WITH THEE WHERE THOU ART

“SHALAM” 5<sup>TH</sup>. August 1964 F.R. & M.B. (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, August 1964, p. ii).

## **Doris Taylor: A Servant of All**

Fred and Mary also spent time in Adelaide before returning to Perth. Fred, who had taken on the job of writing up the rest of the trip, recalls meeting Doris Taylor, the founder of Meals on Wheels.<sup>256</sup>

*What was probably one of the most exhilarating meetings of Mary's Tour was staged in Adelaide for my benefit. The night before we were leaving for HOME Mary said to me "You must meet my friend, Doris Taylor". So, a phone call was put through & an appointment made.*

*That evening we spent two hours with a truly great Soul who is demonstrating "Love in Action". Bedridden since childhood (I would say some 45–50 years ago) she began about 10 years ago to organise the movement now known as "Meals on Wheels". She had nothing but a donation of £5 from the Pensioners League to start off with & she has built that up into many thousands of pounds worth of equipment & assets for The Organisation...She now has Government recognition & a Gov. appointed secretarial assistant.*

*Meals on Wheels Inc. was started by Doris Taylor as a means of aiding the Aged & infirm living lonely lives, in their own homes. Now she has thousands of voluntary workers organised, all inspired by the example of this organising genius cheerfully & gladly demonstrating that "THE GREATEST AMONGST YOU SHALL BE THE SERVANT OF ALL".*

*The love for those she considered to be less fortunate than herself has been the driving force that has been pouring thro' Doris Taylor – Intuitively KNOWING The Laws of Life & applying them in Loving Service to others, Mary classifies her as "one of the greatest Souls of our times" & she doesn't even know (for sure) that she is a Soul – She*

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<sup>256</sup> Meals on Wheels owe its existence to the vision of Doris Taylor MBE (1901–1968), a remarkable South Australian. As a result of a childhood accident, Taylor was permanently disabled by the age of sixteen, living the rest of her life confined to a wheelchair. Intelligent, compassionate and energetic, she became intensely aware of the problems of the disadvantaged. In 1953 Doris organised a public meeting to launch Meals on Wheels. As a young solicitor, Don Dunstan, later Premier of South Australian, helped to draw up the incorporation of Meals on Wheels and became its first president, serving from 1954-59 (Doris Taylor is also credited with persuading Dunstan, to join the Labor Party). From its outset Meals on Wheels delivered five hot meals weekly to people unable to cook for themselves. It continues to do so almost seventy years later. (<http://www.mealsonwheelssa.org.au/history>, accessed 2.12.2008; <http://www.womenshistory.com.au/image.asp?iID=397>, accessed 5.10.2011).

*calls herself an Agnostic. . . I have yet to see a more powerful demonstration of God in Action thro' a member of The Family of GOD.*

*When I first saw her Shining countenance beaming up at me from her bed, my first words were to the effect that when her work is finished & it is time for her to go HOME, she will get the surprise of her life for – in my belief – all the Hosts of Heaven will be assembled to give her the Welcome she has so truly earned (Robinson, in Shalam Light, August 1964, pp. 17–19).*

That Mary had friends like Doris Taylor attests to her social-work credentials. With people like WILF's Irene Greenwood as associates, Mary did indeed know some 'great souls' who were active in serving society in various ways. When Mary began mixing with the more overt spiritual practitioners and channels, she naturally tended to lose touch with her more politically and socially inclined friends and associates. Had Mary kept and fostered her contacts with the social innovators she already knew, a more socially meaningful group may have developed during the 1970s. The intensity of the *channellings* associated with the *Cosmic Changes* detailed in the Universal Link's prophecies, was something of a diversion from the more central message of 'selfless loving service' which was always central to both Mary Broun and Fred Robinson. Having said this, they firmly believed that spreading this prophetic message was the most important service that they could perform for society.

## **Back to Shalam**

Fred epitomises Mary's journey, using her truth seeking journey to counter common accusations about him, while making an emphatic *simple statement of truth* – in much the same way as he did in the 1970s to a new generation of more accepting seekers.

*The next day we boarded the Plane for the last lap of Mary's journey "Around the World" – 38 days from Perth to Perth – carrying The SHALAM Torch... Seeking Truth, Love, Harmony & Understanding Hearts – & finding them wherever she went. She could have gone searching for "False prophets", if she had so chosen & again she would have found what she was searching for. There are NO false prophets in "THE FAMILY OF GOD" – for "GOD TO WHOM ALL THOUGHTS ARE KNOWN AND*

*FROM WHOM NO SECRETS ARE HID” is in our Prayer Book and is a simple statement of Truth & we KNOW it is (Robinson, in Shalam Light, August 1964, p. 18).*

Fred, on a roll with his writing, and nearing the end of the last page, changes from double spacing (which I suspect Mary had insisted on) to single-spacing so as to squeeze in a mini-sermon; and this included a cracker-challenge to their readership – vintage Fred Robinson. On the last page of this 1960s *Shalam Light*, just as at the end of a lecture in the 1970s, Fred is twice as intense, wanting to finish off with a clincher that would *catalyse* his reader or his live audience, whereas in mid-text, or in mid-speech, he was much more reasonable and a titch less dogmatic. The terms which have an *absolute* or exaggerated ring to them have been bolded in the following:

*If we have **anything** to hide, we **do not belong** to His Family – we have **cut ourselves off**, of our own Free Choice. The Human Race is faced with a **Great Decision**. We have Individual Freedom to choose. **Do YOU desire to belong to “THE FAMILY OF GOD” or not? Yes or no?***

*We at SHALAM, having evaluated **all the available evidence** have voted **YES** – wholeheartedly and joyously, for Mary has experienced by physical contact **the ecstatic Joy** of knowing her innermost **secret** Ideals are **as an open book** to the Understanding of those **Great Souls** she searched for & **found**, who **are paving The Way** for our Beloved WAYSHOWER – Jesus of Nazareth – **THE LORD OF LOVE** – Fred & Mary (in *Shalam Light*, August 1964, p. 18).*

Today, as I read these hyperbolic *eitherorish* texts, I find it difficult to understand how Mary, who was in many ways much more reasonable and less intense than Fred – and much more aware of social appropriateness – allowed Fred to get away with such heavy handed and unreasonable rhetoric in their joint publications. I can only assume that she was under his thrall, believing that he was acting as *God’s Catalyst* in challenging – even forcing – people into making the choices he believed they needed to make, right then. The same intensity can be witnessed amongst televangelists as they come to the end of their sermon. Enthusiasm for an ideal/idea can spill over into fanaticism in the implementation. This happens to sales people, political leaders, and those who feel responsibility in all domains of life, all over the world – not just in the world of NRMs.

## A Turning Point for Shalam

It is useful to further explore Fred's creative assessment of Mary's trip. Here Fred employs the mixed metaphor of Shalam as the 'Lighthouse', and Mary the 'Olympic Torch Bearer', to elucidate the importance of the trip from the perspective of a *Shalamic* Destiny:

*And now I want you all to know my own final impression of this very memorable Tour, which, it is already clear, marks a turning point in our lives & destiny of SHALAM.*

*My Beloved Mary was a runner of note in her youthful days. Now she is a "Runner" in the Spiritual World – The Inner World of Cosmic Reality – where Truth & Love reign supreme.*

*When we first came to SHALAM I visualised a Lighthouse on the highest point of our land, overlooking the whole district for many miles around. I dreamt of the 'LIGHT' from it expanding until it would be visible all over this favoured land of "AUSTRAL-AQUARIA."*

*So, on June 20<sup>th</sup> (after a period of strict training) our Olympic Runner set off with her "Flaming Torch" – "THE LIGHT THAT MUST NOT FAIL" & THE UNIVERSAL LINK.*

*She brought back with her, to SHALAM, a Transmuted flame. . . She came HOME 38 days later, consciously aware that she belonged to the FAMILY OF GOD & that The Greatest Adventure Mankind can CHOOSE to embark upon had started. She brought back with her "THE LIGHT THAT CANNOT FAIL" & with her Torch kindled The Ever-burning Flame in the Lighthouse we had erected at SHALAM.*

*Obviously a "LIGHTHOUSE" provides a WARNING Light, indicating where dangerous reefs lie, but what a relief to weary Mariners, worn out with battling Storm & Tempest. At last they "see The Light" which is a sure & certain guide to the Safe Harbour they are "SEEKING". The Lighthouse Keeper's duty is to keep "The Light" burning. . The Mariner must be alert & steer his course by it. Of necessity there can be no faintest shadow of doubt in his mind as to the utter reliability of The Message conveyed by The Warning Light, maintained as a Loving Service to Mankind... So I see it: So Be It (Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, August 1964, pp. 15–16).*

Fred was very sure of his own message, and was ecstatic to see Mary similarly so assured that she belonged to the family of God – and a true believer in the imminence of the *New Age of Aquarius*. Perhaps Mary's trip cemented their relationship. They had already become an effective working team through *Shalam Light*, and the development of their 'working prototype model'. They clearly loved one another with a devotion that was clear to me when I met them seven years later. When I first met Fred he would speak of how many full-moons had passed since he had first met Mary – he was



constantly aware of time cycles, and the treasuring of his good memories: ‘*The only thing you can take with you when you leave Stephen are your memories – so keep gathering good ones*’. With all his tough cosmic talk, and heavy *propheticatalysing*, he was a romantic at heart, and a very sweet natured person when talking personally. If Fred was a cosmic calamity, he was also a domestic boon. When there were no visitors to catalyse and physical work to do, he could be quiet, relaxed and contented. Fred had always been a hard worker and competent handyman. It was only when he got too wound up with his message, that he became the intense and dogmatic prophet.

### **Mary’s Mission by Mary**

The following text headed “MY MISSION”, the first page of which was placed on the right-hand side of the centrefold of this 1964 August edition, is a revealing account of how Mary viewed her trip, examining the overall mission she had been engaged in. The language is that of a religious visionary, with a rhythm born of the syntactic gymnastics of old.

*For many years, both Fred & I have had an inner urge to Unify. To bring about the Brotherhood of Man. And each, in our own way, have worked towards this end. We see the World as ONE – ONE FAMILY UNDER GOD – ONE UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD OF MAN. And this is why, I seem to see, that I was used to pay a visit to our Friends across the sea. To Link them up, in Love, a golden thread to weave. A LOVE LINKED CHAIN around The World.*

*From Land to Land I flew, in search of TRUTH & Brotherhood... And this is what I found. All Hearts of Gold were they – All members of THE FAMILY OF GOD. Now, I must confess, that I was not drawn to Groups that harmonised, but rather was I drawn to those that did not harmonise. I wondered why this was, but now I see it all. No effort is required to unify the ones that harmonise. But what of those Great Power Houses that do NOT harmonise...THE FAMILY OF GOD IS ONE, AND UNITY IS STRENGTH (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, August 1964, p. 9).*

This is classic *contrary-Mary*. She sculpted her life against the grain, and in the process found out something about the wood, the trees and the New Age forest of the 1960s. As Australia’s ambassador to the groups that were ‘not harmonising’ – those involved in *inter-cultic* conflict – Mary believed she became aware of certain principles that could be used to *harmonise God’s Family*:

*I saw beneath the outer scene to where the difficulty did lie. . . The sacrifice that these great Souls had made to come to Earth & bring to us their own aspect of TRUTH. . . A contribution of Loving Selfless service to us, the wayward ones. . . My heart was full of love & gratitude, & then was given me, THE PRINCIPLE OF UNITY – How I, & those like me, could help to harmonise & unify The One Great FAMILY OF GOD.*

*Love is the key, as ever it has been. First we need to Recognise the God in those we would unite. And then APPRECIATE the sacrifice that they have made for us. . . Give THANKS TO GOD that these, our Elder Brothers, have come to lend a hand, in this our MIGHTY NEED (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, August 1964, p. 9).*

In this issue Mary continued to explain her ‘Principle of Unity’, drawing again on her archaic lexicon, this time including closely woven tropes that seek to be energised by the use of some *proper-nouning* and capitalisation. This paragraph bombards readers with an artillery of literary devices designed to take readers captive, and then tortures them with capitals, until they cry ‘I GET IT!’ The effect however can also turn many readers away. Here she makes her conclusion:

*Now as our Love & Gratitude pour forth to these Magnetic Centres, a Golden Thread we weave. Invisible tho’ it be, a mighty force we wield. A Bridge of Love we see & so it does become. A CANOPY OF GOLDEN THREADS AROUND THE WORLD – A MAGNETIC FLOW OF VITAL ENERGY – A CHAIN REACTION TO WHICH THERE IS NO LIMIT – POSITIVE CONSTRUCTIVE LOVE, unqualified by lesser thoughts is GOD IN ACTION – AND THIS IS THE KEY TO UNITY (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, August 1964, p. 10).*

Mary was aware that many of her ‘principles’ could be seen as what could be called *dreamthink*. With this awareness she makes a start at a *Rogierian Argument*.<sup>257</sup> Making a defence of her stance, she returns to her own thoughts about the mistakes and contradictions which were constantly bothersome in validating the Robinsonian *cosmic viewpoint*:

*Perhaps you think I float on clouds of glad illusion, & am not prepared to face ‘apparent contradiction’, errors, mistakes & all the rest, that have bothered us no end. If the Key to Unity is Love unqualified, then obviously an Understanding must be had of error. For bogies would but bind us, & FREE we certainly must be; so let us now examine error.*

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<sup>257</sup> The psychologist Carl Rogers developed a negotiating strategy called ‘empathic listening’. In an empathic position, the writer refrains from passing judgment on the audience’s ideas until he or she has listened attentively to the audience’s position, tried to follow the audience’s reasoning, and acknowledged the validity of the audience’s viewpoint (if only from a limited perspective). By trying to understand where the audience is coming from and avoiding loaded or attacking language that might put the audience on the defensive, the writer shows empathy for the audience’s viewpoint and opens the door for mutual understanding and respect. This psychological approach encourages people to listen to each other rather than to try to shout each other down (<http://www2.winthrop.edu/wcenter/handoutsandlinks/rogerian.htm>, accessed 26.2.2010).

*Apparent Contradictions are often just the opposite ends of a basic Truth, & if we hold them in the corner of our consciousness the missing Link is given. Every Positive must have its negative & and every Masculine its Feminine. Some truths are brought by one approach whilst others come, a balance view to give (Broun, in Shalam Light, August 1964, pp. 10–11).*

It was clear however that channels made personal mistakes. They were either brusque or difficult like Sydney Cadman; were smokers or flesh-eaters using the *old excuse* (as Fred called it) of ‘I-need-to-keep-my-vibrations-down-to-stay-on-the-earth’; or were perhaps ‘enlightened’ channels who had attracted a harem of female students. Whatever the defect was, if they were perceived as a ‘Great Soul’ who had come to earth to help us through this dark period, then perhaps they could be forgiven. Mary continues with her argument along such lines:

*But this is not the all, for error still persists. This I see as “Human”, the limitations of the “Coat of Clay”. And maybe it is true that none there are exempt. For all that wear the common clay are subject to its limitations.*

*Great souls I’ve seen, & felt the burden of their bondage. A self-inflicted sacrifice; “Imprisoned Splendour” I beheld. All subject to the error a human body brings... FREE – to come and go at Will, but determined, by the love they have for us & their loyalty to GOD, to see it through & help us to the end (Broun, in Shalam Light, August 1964, p. 11).*

Perhaps Mary was silently alluding to Fred, for she had *felt the burden of his bondage*. She certainly regarded him as a ‘Great Soul’ who had (re)incarnated from somewhere to help at this momentous time. Such beings ‘come and go at Will’ – the capitalisation of the word ‘Will’ meaning their ‘Higher Self’s will, a kind of *Divine soul-sized Will* which sits above the *human clay-like will*. Their presence however is purposeful, and part of the larger design.

In the following statement of her Mission, Mary’s exposition of ‘TRUTH’ becomes a circular argument, for after an axiomatic statement she simply restates it:

*TRUTH – is not altered by what we think of it. It stays the same regardless of belief. So why be bothered forming set opinions. Why not be pliable until The Truth’s revealed. The wide expanse of Truth is far beyond the human mind...But bit by bit we see it fit just like a giant jig-saw puzzle. And as the pieces fit into place the Truth is then revealed, and seeing this we Know, & KNOWING has no need of argument (Broun, in Shalam Light, August 1964, p. 11).*

The above, via its quite reasonable stance about ‘forming set opinions’ fails to notice that some of the pieces in her own *jig-saw puzzle of truth* have perhaps been forced to fit. In the excitement of ‘believing’, Mary is convinced she has found the missing pieces of the puzzle. Her assumptive ‘KNOWING’ that they fit, prior to the puzzle’s completion, means that the puzzle is compromised. Thus the jig-saw puzzle analogy, while sincerely put, is inadequate in solving the puzzle of the truth about ‘the TRUTH’. Mary often went beyond even her own injunction ‘*Why not be pliable until the Truth’s revealed. The wide expanse of Truth is far beyond the human mind ...*’ The temptation of a religious ‘believer’ to employ ‘faith’ and ‘knowing’ in the solving of religious puzzles is likely to run the risk of assuming conclusions outside the realm of faith and knowing. This is a theme relevant to the discussion about New Religious Movements’ penchant for the *true-believing* of unsubstantiated propositions.

Mary believed that because she and Fred sincerely had the benefit of the world in mind, they could confidently expect, through the fact of their faith, to be given all the truth they needed:

*All Truth is given to those who wish to use it for the betterment of Man...But they who would seek knowledge for the sake of storing it – look out – for this does lead to trouble. The Pure truth of GOD flows in as we pour it out in loving selfless service. But storing stops the flow & confusion then results. We can only really Know that which we need to know...* (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, August 1964, pp. 11–12).

The idea of allowing different kinds of energy *to flow through* one, rather than being *held back*, is part of the New Age canon – *Cosmic Law*. Having money *flow through you* (spend/give it), rather than hoarded (save/invest it) is seen to *free up* material energy, allowing a *cyclic flow* of money to be set up.<sup>258</sup> The same is applied here with

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<sup>258</sup> This New Age’ equation of ‘freely giving’ so as to ‘freely receive’ derives in part from the Biblical injunction that exhorted believers to: ‘Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give’ (Mathew 10:8, KJV). Florence Scovel Shinn (1871-1940) is arguably the most influential of modern writers to place this Biblical text within a ‘New Age’ framework. Shinn was an American artist and book illustrator who became a New Thought spiritual teacher and metaphysical writer in her middle years. *The Game of Life and How To Play It* (1925) was her most successful book. Mary Broun-Robinson had absorbed its teachings and made it part of the reading list for the UBI Seekers of the 1970s. Chapter I is entitled the ‘The Game’ and starts:

Most people consider life a battle, but it is not a battle, it is a game. It is a game, however, which cannot be played successfully without the knowledge of spiritual law, and the Old and New Testaments give the rules of the game with wonderful clearness. Jesus Christ taught that it was a great game of Giving and Receiving (Shinn 1925, p. 7).

‘Truth’ – holding onto Truth is seen to cause stagnation. Fred and Mary would be pained at the idea that their ‘Truths’ could be regarded as dogmatic or as contributing to a *New-Age fundamentalism*. However, it is telling that mortgages and banks (and by extension savings) were seen as instruments of the evil *Illuminati*, whose policies captured souls and kept them hard at work – usually relatively ‘useless’ work. Universities for instance were seen as time-wasting institutions focused on mere intellectual knowledge. *The world’s money, the world’s work* and *the world’s knowledge* were thus seen as perverting and diverting innocent *New Age souls* away from what the Robinsons assessed as the urgent Aquarian ‘needs of the moment’ – one of Fred Robinson’s favourite mantras.

In the early 1970s universities were seen as ‘the competition’. I and others took Fred to university meetings organised by interested seekers, where his target market was often ambivalent about the kind of learning their parents were so keen for them to undertake. Fred and Mary saw their *Work* as providing real education. They taught ‘*The Laws of Life and How to Live Them*’ and soon conceived of Shalam, and later the Universal Brotherhood, as the Australian campus of a real, true and cosmically meaningful *Universe-ity* – God’s University – a place where students could study for the imminent exam that would qualify a soul for the New Age.

*We came to do a job – each one of us, & as we do the work we came to do, the Truth we need is freely given. Each truth, we claim, brings in its train, its own responsibility, & must be used, lest blockages reduce our flexibility. . .*

*ONLY AS WE USE THE TRUTH WE NOW DO KEEP,  
IN SELFLESS SERVICE TO OUR FELLOW MAN,  
SHALL WE FIND THE TRUTH WE YEARN & SEEK* (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, p. 12).

Having made sense of truth, work, selfless service and societal responsibility, Mary turns to the individual soul, its efforts, motives, and finally its salvation:

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The trope of ‘game’ applied to ‘living’ is a major reframing literary device used by New Thought and New Age authors. Some 1970s New Agers saw this as meaning a mostly enjoyable game, but the first-wave of New Age pioneers like Shinn and Broun saw it as a vitally important game with very clear rules and needing an intense training regime if it were to be played ‘well’. New Age motivational writer and speaker Louise Hay acknowledged that she studied the metaphysical works of authors like Florence Scovel Shinn, who claimed that positive thinking could change people’s material circumstances ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florence\\_Scovel\\_Shinn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florence_Scovel_Shinn); [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louise\\_Hay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louise_Hay), accessed 28.3.2011).

*While each Soul must save itself, by its own efforts, it is the MOTIVE, the pure intent, that starts the chain reaction, & ends in its salvation (Broun, in Shalam Light, August 1964, p. 12).*

After sorting out the individual soul and the principle of chain-reaction in relation to salvation, Mary extrapolates from microcosmic *soulific* salvation to a macrocosmic *planetary* salvation that needed the *harmonicommunity* of the New Age groups she is writing about here. Mary continued to teach this idea to baby-boomer Seekers a decade later:

*And this same principle which applies to the individual, applies also to the Planet. Sufficient dedicated Souls of purity and of Love, unqualified by lesser thoughts, can start a chain reaction, & to this there is no end – no limit – for it is surely GOD IN ACTION. Our HOPE, as I see it, lies in The Unity of THE ONE GREAT FAMILY OF GOD. Our Elder Brothers, now incarnate, are centred round the World. . . Great Forcefields of stability, to which we may be linked – THE UNIVERSAL LINK in its wider sense. And LOVE is the Key that MUST be used to set us Free (Broun, in Shalam Light, August 1964, p. 12).*

The Robinsons' increasing focus (perhaps obsession) with the prophecies of the Universal Link, as they came through many channels, can be traced right through until the Robinsons' death – Fred in 1983 and Mary in 1989. Even as the intensity of their *cosmicconcern* for the planet and its people increased, they continued to interact with the friends of Shalam in Perth, and connect with many of their readers world-wide, often communicating about subjects and people far removed from the imminent changes absorbing much of their attention. Certainly life for the Robinsons was diverse, interesting and eventful, as their project gained momentum. We were moving towards the date they saw as earth shattering – in every sense. It was to arrive on or before 12.00 midnight, Christmas Eve, 1967.

## Chapter 9: Shalam Life and a Japanese Prophet

The outcome of Mary's thirty eight day pilgrimage/mission was that she returned a more confident and dedicated *Light Worker*. The compilation and collation of the New Age *Truths* which had been Fred and Mary's work prior to this tour, were now supplemented by Mary's personal experience and her overview of the whole movement. The eclectic range of beliefs and activities she saw reified the universalism of the New Age, affirming that which Fred and Mary had already embraced. Now Mary was an expert. She was more dedicated than ever, and, if she had up until this time deferred to Fred, from now on she assumed the mantle of editor of *Shalam Light*.

### ***The Laws of Life and How to Live Them (1964)***

In the next extant issue of *Shalam Light*, October 1964, Fred introduces a simple text book, written by Mary, and designed to make *Universal Laws* accessible to anyone. This book (clearly taking its name from Shinn's *The Game of Life and How to Play It* (1925), was to become a key plank in the education of the New Age Seekers who worked with the Robinsons in the 1970s and '80s, becoming a text that *needed to be absorbed* as part of the movement's orientation/induction process:

*Dear Friends,*

*In preparation for the Mass Awakening, when ALL decent people will be given the incentive to CHANGE their accepted Way of Life & make an effort to DO the Right Thing (once they are aware as to what a 'Right Course of Action' is) we are working on a small Text Book to meet the need.*

*It will be quite short. Anyone can understand it &, in our opinion, anyone can put it into practice, if they wish to. It is called "THE LAWS OF LIFE AND HOW TO LIVE THEM". Since Mary's trip overseas, she has given a lot of thought to this matter & she finally felt compelled to do something constructive about it.*

*If any of you would like to introduce it to any of your friends, who have been too absorbed in the economic struggle, to spare the time to understand what is happening to our Planet, & what they should be doing about it (especially those with young families) the cost for the materials and postage will be approximately 1/3d each. We will be happy to supply you with as many as you can use. (It can be safely given to anyone without them getting the wrong impression as to motive etc.) (Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, October 1964, pp. 1-2).*

## The New Theology

Fred also makes mention here of ‘a series of leaflets’ that could be circulated ‘amongst average citizens’ in the ‘big & busy cities’ to elucidate the ‘New Theology’, mainly from the *Urantia Book*, which he believed would ‘appeal to the open minded scientist & philosopher of modern times...’ (Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, October 1964, p. 2). In linking to these ‘modern times’, both Fred and Mary were open to many more mainstream strands of belief. They were involved in many of the religious discussions and talks which took place in Perth during the 1960s. Fred mentions one of these specifically:

*The Adult Education Board’s lecture room was crowded to capacity to hear a short series of talks and discussions on the book “Honest to God” by the Bishop of Woolwich.*<sup>259</sup>

*The Rev. David Martin in his introductory talk said “If a new Theology was presented and it was True, it would have to be accepted...”* (Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, October 1964, p. 2).

Fred must have taken this as a hopeful sign – believing their new leaflet, entitled the ‘New Theology’ (1964), was the answer to many of the questions discussed during the series.

*The outline of a new Theology based upon the Revealed Knowledge given in the Urantia Book is what we feel is needed by any sincere person who is making an effort to understand his relationship to his fellowman, to Jesus, his Creator, The Father of all Life & Light & to the Universe ...* (ibid.).

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<sup>259</sup> John T. A. Robinson’s book *Honest to God* aroused a storm of controversy on its original publication by SCM Press in 1963. In the author’s own evaluation of *Honest to God*, he stated that the chief contribution of this book was its successful synthesis of the work of seemingly opposed theologians Paul Tillich, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Rudolf Bultmann. The overwhelming theory of *Honest to God* is the idea that having rejected the idea of ‘God up there’, modern secular man also needs to recognise that the idea of ‘God out there’ is also an outdated simplification of the nature of divinity. Rather, Christians should take their cue from the existentialist theology of Paul Tillich, and consider God to be ‘the ground of our being’ ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honest\\_to\\_God](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honest_to_God), accessed 27.2.2010). John T.A. Robinson’s book inspired Bishop John Shelby Spong. Spong’s books suggest that the literal interpretation of Christian scripture does not speak honestly to the situation of modern Christian communities, and that a more nuanced approach to scripture, informed by scholarship and compassion, can be consistent with both Christian tradition and a contemporary understanding of the universe. He believes, as did his theological predecessor, Bishop John A.T. Robinson, that theism has lost credibility as a valid conception of God’s nature ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Shelby\\_Spong](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Shelby_Spong), accessed 11.10.2010).



## Dr. Werther and Tibetan Refugees

The name Dr. Werther is mentioned in a number of *Shalam Lights* and newsletters. The entries provide evidence of a good relationship with Perth's main yoga teacher of the period, and a symbiotic coexistence between his Eastern Teachings and the Robinsons' Western Teachings.<sup>260</sup> The February 1965 edition of *Shalam Light* mentions a humanitarian initiative related to Tibetan refugees (Fred uses the older form 'Thibetan') in India which is unlikely to have been recorded elsewhere:

*Dr. Werther, President of The Divine Life Society, in Perth, has recently returned from a trip to various Ashrams in India which even led him to the presence of The Dalai Lama, of Thibet. This was in the foothills of the Himalayas. Here he came face to face with the tragic problem of the unwanted orphan Thibetan children. Seeing that it is not a practical proposition under present Governmental policies to bring orphan children from other countries into Australia, the next best course of action seems to be on the lines proposed by Dr. Werther.*

*He himself "Adopted" one of these children, who now regards him as her Father. It costs the Doctor £1 per week to pay for her "Food, Clothing & Shelter". This is being done by existing groups on the spot. But where they have put up about 20 homes, each accommodation about 25 children, there are thousands of refugee camps, where the people are just existing.*

*They are a heavy burden upon the conscience of Civilisation & the Good Doctor realises that someone, somehow, somewhere has GOT to do something of a practical nature about it. W.A. must see to it that he is not ploughing a lonely furrow. There is a good reason why PERTH has been christened "THE CIY OF LIGHT" (Broun & Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, February 1965, p. 2).*

I vaguely remember Fred Robinson telling me about this sponsoring programme and Mary's participation in it. Fred, as per his vow of poverty, had no money of his own and so left all financial decisions to Mary. The idea that the Robinsons were insular escapists, as they were often cast in the press, is unjustified.

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<sup>260</sup> In an interview with Rachael Kohn (*The Spirit of Things*, 2002) about the early days of yoga in Australia, Anna Nolan relates: 'The first swami that I can find that came to Australia, visited the branch of the Divine Life Society in Perth in 1959 that had been set up by Dr Rudolf Werther in 1954. That was Swami Vishni Devananda' (<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/relig/spirit/stories/s445713.htm>, accessed 21.2.2010). I met Dr. Werther on a number of occasions in the early days of the formation of the Community. I mainly visited him at his home, where he gave me useful advice. He was as supportive of the Robinsons' New Age initiatives as the Robinsons were of his Yogic teachings.

## Mary's Elimination Diet

Early in 1965 Mary completed a 77-day fast on double-strained fruit and vegetable juices and watery broths. While Mary's own description of her fast has not been found, an endorsement of it in a letter by Hans Delmar was published in the July 1965 *Shalam Light*. I have included the introduction to this letter as well, for it reveals a mutual appreciation:

*(Mr. H. DELMAR 87 John St., Merrylands, is the oldest student of The Wonder Book of the Ages, as OAH SPE has been called, & he imports The Book from England & puts it into circulation at the cost price of 37/6 posted. All sincere New-Age students should possess a copy. In our opinion it is the cheapest & most valuable BOOK in the World.) The following excerpts are taken from a letter received this week from Mr. Delmar (Robinson, in Shalam Light, July 1965 p. ii).*

*'I was greatly interested in reading about Mary's Elimination Diet Fast, lasting 77 days. Surely a deliberate and determined undertaking, if ever there was one. It was an amazing achievement, & I feel sure that the benefit to her health & general wellbeing made it more than worthwhile. It should serve as a stimulus for others to "Go & do likewise" in an effort to eliminate the accumulated Toxins from the body. Such an undertaking however, is not for the "The Souls that slumber", but only for those who have a wider & truer vision of things Spiritual. All others will remain content with their flesh-pots...'* (Delmar, in *Shalam Light*, July 1965, p. ii).

The two pages of extracts of Delmar's letter includes a condemnation of smoking as 'one of the most insidious of vices' (ibid., p. ii); and a statement about 'the slaughter of animals in order to eat their bodies' (ibid.), which he regards as 'a form of cannibalism' (ibid.). Delmar also made a comment on the link between cancer and diet, an issue which was of much interest to the Robinsons during this period:

*Aspiring thoughts are food for the soul, even as fragrant fruits and greens should be the food of the body. THEN CANCER AND ALLIED DISEASES WOULD BE UNHEARD OF* (ibid., p.iii).

## Cancer Cure

The subject of cancer-cure appears in a couple of the surviving issues of *Shalam Light*, the first being as part of an article entitled 'Obedience to the Laws of Life' (April 1965, p. 1). Unfortunately the supplementary leaflet mentioned in this edition is not part of the archive I have collected:

*The Supplementary Leaflet in this issue, with clear cut instructions (that any child can follow), which enables anyone to cure themselves of Cancer (provided no vital organs have been irreparably destroyed) puts the position as it is now facing humanity: You decide to comply with The Law or accept the consequences & drop out of the Race for the time being (Robinson, in Shalam Light, April 1965, pp. 1–2).*

As a result of this pamphlet substantial publicity was given the Robinsons in Perth; most of which was no doubt uncomplimentary – but then that would have been expected. That this publicity was seen to have at least done its work is evidenced by the September 1965 issue of *Shalam Light*; for the publicity evidently went as far as New Zealand.

## **Spiritualising the Commercial**

In the following the Robinsons can be seen as an important link in the alternative health network in *Australasia* during the 1960s. Certainly, their freely given advertising in *Shalam Light* must have been appreciated:

### **COMFRY AND POLLEN PRODUCTS FOR BETTER HEALTH**

*(Mr. T. Wallace Dick, of 201 Lambton Quay, is a naturopath of long-standing, in Wellington, New Zealand. Our 'Cancer Cure' publicity brought him into our orbit & he has been spreading our Self-Help Treatment amongst his wide circle of acquaintances. Amongst them was Mr. & Mrs. Stratford, trading as 'COMFREY SUPPLIES (N.Z) Ltd. P.O. Box 122, OTOROHANGA NZ. They infuse a lot of loving Service into their desire to bring health into the homes of the sick. Their products are NATURAL & we have asked for a supply of price lists which we will include, if they arrive in time. For city dwellers their service is a must (Broun & Robinson, in Shalam Light, September 1965, p. 14).*

One of the Robinsons' many mottos, *practicalise the spiritual and spiritualise the commercial*, can be seen in practice in the above. Even during their most cosmic campaigns, practical messages and down-to-earth health initiatives were included. The following, taken from the October 1965 edition of *Shalam Light*, reveals how a confirmation of one of Ethera's cosmic initiatives is seamlessly followed by the reporting of one of their own initiatives to help locals give up smoking:

*... This is it my friends: The Cosmic Clock of Destiny is chiming midnight & the Hosts of Heaven are giving us all a clear cut lead through a very courageous WOMAN. . . . Our Elimination Diet is proving to be a great boon to an ever increasing number of people who are willing to Help themselves. From our own personal experience we knew that breaking The Master HABIT of the human race (eating) all habits would automatically be broken. BUT – as we*

*ourselves were not smokers we had no first hand evidence that The Juice Fast would break the smoking habit. . Well – our friends, who were smokers, are now finding out for themselves that it does do so. . We are contemplating another advert. In our local Press “Free Self Help Treatment. Stop Smoking in 3 days & begin to enjoy life”. F.R. (Robinson, in Shalam Light, October 1965, p. 2).*

## **Fighting Dental Decay**

When the Robinsons’ attention had been drawn to any breakthrough in the arena of human well-being or natural healing, they immediately shared that knowledge with their readership – and often before it had been scientifically accepted. Their experience of bad publicity regarding their ‘cancer cure’ claims made them all the more determined to share healthy alternatives to accepted practices. Their belief in a world-wide conspiracy against *the simple Truth* (in all domains of life) gave them enormous energy to promote alternative remedies. The countercultural, subversive, missionary zeal of the Robinsons was one of the most appealing of their qualities to my generation. In the following article (source unknown) the Robinsons summarise a German dental-health experiment that was still in progress at the time of writing:

### ***A COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN AGAINST DENTAL DECAY***

*Our attention has just been drawn to a heart warming experiment to protect the teeth of children, as NATURE would have it:– Mönchweiler – a Village of 2,000 inhabitants, on the edge of the Black Forrest in Europe – is making Medical History & is putting to flight all artificial methods of preserving Teeth or general HEALTH. The whole population is banded together in this struggle against the CAUSE of Caries. Parents, Teachers, Doctors, the Village Council & all members of the trading Community are as one solid body. It has been accepted by all of them that the chief enemies of sound teeth are the various refined carbohydrates – such as white flour, white sugar, etc. So now the Village bakers bake wholemeal Bread from freshly ground whole grain (that is including the germ & bran layers), with the addition of SEA SALT (giving minerals and trace elements) with yeast as leaven. The Bakers thus conform to the suggestions made by Prof. Kollath, a generation ago.<sup>261</sup>*

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<sup>261</sup> Werner Kollath (1882–1970), physician, hygienist and nutritional scientist, was an important and influential spokesperson for a natural, whole foods diet, and a severe critic of processed food manufacturers. At the Hygiene Institute at the University of Breslau, he formulated twelve edicts of hygiene, in which a natural diet played an important role. His book *Foundations, Methods and Goals of Hygiene* (1937) was approved of by the authorities in Nazi Germany, probably because of the passages on eugenics. Kollath’s nutritional advice was simple and direct – leave food as natural as possible. Kollath argued for cooperation between natural and orthodox medicine in his book *Towards Oneness in Medical Science* (1942) and reprinted as recently as 1988. Kollath is credited with the introduction of the term ‘probiotics’: ‘active substances that are essential for a healthy development of life’ (Park 2009, p.29) ([http://www.bodyhealing.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=394&Itemid=35](http://www.bodyhealing.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=394&Itemid=35), accessed 22.2.2010).

... *This Community effort towards Right Living started in March 1963. It has developed a system which in 20 years will produce a generation with sound teeth. This CHANGE must take place on the broadest basis of everyday life. It can NOT be done by Chemicals and Poisons* (Broun & Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, July 1965, p. iv.).<sup>262</sup>

The issue of the ‘mass poisoning’ of water supplies by fluoridation, and the deliberate mass production of aluminium cooking utensils to debilitate much of the population, were issues that the Robinsons also explored. I suspect Fred had been aware of Kollath’s wholemeal bread; and that it was this specialist, organic, stone-ground bread which had been baked by the Rosicrucian Order of the Aquarians, and which he was delivering around Brisbane from the Order’s Dutton Park Temple/Bakery during the 1930s and early 1940s.

## **Sustainability**

When I arrived at Shalam at the end of 1971 the Robinsons had a Schnitzner-designed Bosch hand-operated and electric driven household grain stone-mill – with adjustable milling stones. Mary’s eldest son, Noel, was a wheat farmer and so a barter system operated during this period: Fruit and vegetables from Shalam for the grains Noel grew in and around Coorow in the West Australian Wheat Belt.

In the above the Robinsons can be seen to be extrapolating ideas about natural living which have been taken up by the *Sustainability Movement* of the twenty-first century. Currently in Australia, Stephanie Alexander’s Kitchen Garden Programme in schools can be seen as developing from ideas that had been put forward by the Robinsons in Australia during the 1960s. Alexander’s Program aims to develop lifelong skills in good nutrition.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> A study on the effectiveness of education to improve dental health was indeed carried out in Mönchweiler from 1963–1969. This scientific investigation into the constraining effects of dental caries by informing the public about health foundations and the causes of tooth decay, had its results published in ‘Healthy Teeth from Childhood to Old Age’ by Dr. Johann Georg Schnitzer in 1973. Schnitzer’s research suggested that freshly ground cereals were health-giving; and so he constructed modern household grinders with milling stones which were made for the Bosch Company and sold world-wide (<http://www.dr-schnitzer.de/autorcv4.htm>, accessed 22.2.2010).

<sup>263</sup> ... I think it’s important that somebody stands up for the fact that education has to be about education for life. Children in the Kitchen Garden Program learn how to care for themselves by growing, harvesting, preparing and sharing delicious and wholesome food’ (Stephanie Alexander, <http://www.kitchengardenfoundation.org.au/kgp.shtml>, accessed 22.2.2010).

## Bertrand Russell's 'Right Action'

Considering their faith in God, an article the Robinsons printed in *Shalam Light* in April 1965 is proof of a generous attitude towards anyone who practised *right action* whatever their belief or non-belief. The following is the introduction to excerpts of a book they recommend to their readership:

*UNARMED VICTORY* (First published in 1963, Allen & Unwin, London ed.). This is the title of a Penguin Special, by Bertrand Russell. It was sent to us by our good friend, Harold Morton, of Kellyville, N.S.W. (in our opinion the most well-informed Bookseller in Australia).<sup>264</sup>

*We have been amazed at the tremendous part one (unofficial) individual was able to play in a world crisis & we do recommend that you procure the Book and read it for yourself. The calm sanity of this great man, when the world trembled on the brink of disaster is a shining example from which all may learn a lesson and the world owes him a great debt of gratitude it can never hope to repay.... Thank you, Bertrand Russell.*

*The following is a short extract & a few of the letters, cablegrams etc, which passed between him and the Heads of States during the Cuban Crisis (Broun & Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, April 1965, p.15).*<sup>265</sup>

*Shalam Light* went on to quote nearly four pages of selections from *Unarmed Victory*, focussing on the telegraphs from Russell to Khrushchev and Kennedy. The Robinsons' active engagement with the political issues of the era is counterpointed by concomitantly encouraging the circulation amongst their readers of books which were the polar opposite of Bertrand Russell's reflections on the Cuban *worldly* crisis:

*Our friend, Fred Brooks, of Morongo Valley, in California sent us some copies of Ethera's latest work. We can supply it to you while stocks last. He also sent a wonderful little Booklet, just published. It is by 'A God from a nearby Planet'. "The Book of Space-Ships in their relationship with the Earth" ... In our view it is ideal for young people & and new comers to the New Age Instruction. Too expensive to get a bundle by air, & too slow to get it by sea Mail. We are going to duplicate several hundred copies for distribution amongst you. When you have read it, put it into circulation (Broun & Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, April 1965, p. 2).*

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<sup>264</sup> I remember visiting this erudite gentleman with Fred Robinson soon after we met. Morton kept arcane books on spirituality that even Sydney's Theosophical Society Bookshop didn't have.

<sup>265</sup> At the height of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, Russell dispatched letters to President John F. Kennedy and Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev, bidding them hold summit talks to avert war. Although he was curtly rebuffed by Mr. Kennedy, Russell was convinced that he had been instrumental in settling the dispute peacefully. *Unarmed Victory*, published in 1963, contained this correspondence (<http://www.nytimes.com/books/01/04/29/specials/russell-obit.html>, accessed 11.10.2010).

The Robinsons' zeal to educate Australians about *cosmic reality*, through reprinting booklets like those channelled by Prins, and to thus inspire them into taking *right action* is enunciated in the following:

*The drive on the Mass Educational Programme, making cosmic reality = TRUTH, FREELY AVAILABLE TO ALL SEEKING SOULS, IS NOW GETTING INTO TOP GEAR AT LONG LAST. May you all be inspired to Right Action, led by your inner prompting of the Spirit of GOD in Man.*

*To North, South East & West we send out  
Love & Blessings from 'SHALAM' & Fred and Mary (Shalam Light, April 1965, p. 2).*

## **The Purification Issue**

Via her own experiences of eating only organic home grown food, and a regime that included fasting, Mary had come to agree with Fred's position on vegetarianism and the necessity of *purifying the blood-system*. A sense of convergence was taking place in most domains. As they were reading the same books and receiving the same *channellings* from the *sensitives* Mary had visited, this is not surprising.

The July 1965 issue of *Shalam Light* was 'dedicated to "PURIFICATION"' (p. 1), which they cite as 'the KEY WORD' coming to them 'from all quarters of the Globe' (ibid.). They believed it came in different forms 'according to the activity each group was called to demonstrate' (ibid., p. 10).

*God has given to man many forms of healing:— Herbs, Fasting, Faith Healing, Psychology, Scientology, Affirmation, Decrees, Drugs (rightfully used), Naturopathy, Osteopathy, & many, many more God has sent in HIS Infinite Mercy, to meet our wayward needs, for if we had lived according to HIS LAWS none of these would have been needed at all.*

*However, THE PLANET IS BEING PURIFIED, & there is now need of, and room for, all available methods in this Master Plan for The Healing of The Nations (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, July 1965, p. 1).*

The Robinsons show themselves to be genuinely eclectic as they proselytise the need for this planetary purification. To those working within one specific arena, where the tendency is to become precious about their own contribution, they make a suggestion:

*Those whose work it is to channel this purification to its inhabitants would do well to see this PLAN in its many aspects — for to our notice has come A WIDER PATTERN SET (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, July 1965, p. 1).*

The conscious archaism of the syntax here is a Robinsonian concept shared by Fred and Mary, and worth examining for the way it signals a shift into prophecy.

## Verbs and Tropes

The archaic grammatical verb placements, such as ‘for to our notice has come ...’, and ‘a wider pattern set’, tend to be used to introduce particularly important pronouncements or perspectives which Mary, in particular, regarded as a visionary contribution.<sup>266</sup> Many of Mary’s *writings* during the Universal Brotherhood days of the 1970s and ’80s were couched in such *semi-biblical* language, adding extra weight for some readers, or being seen as anachronistic or just ‘weird’ by others. I, like many of the members of the movement just got used to it. Following Mary’s lead, I got so used to such language I sometimes employed it in my preaching and prayers in/to the group, thinking it was more reverent and spiritual. Fred was not given to using such language unless quoting from *Oahspe* (1883) – a text full of archaic King James *Bible-ese*.

In many articles written by the Robinsons, common tropes and well-worn clichés are employed in making the off-beat cosmic themes more accessible. In the following text Mary uses an array of metaphors to progress her argument: The *pendulum had swung*, revealing a *crying need* that was *calling forth a ray of hope* in the form of a *Wider Pattern Set* – leading to an aphorism to conclude the argument:

*So far has the Pendulum swung against NATURAL LAW that there is now emerging a natural swing in the opposite direction. The common-sense of man is questioning orthodox methods of healing. The crying need of so many despairing sufferers, whom the doctors had given up as hopeless, is now calling forth a ray of hope in the form of a ‘Wider Pattern Set’. Man’s extremity is GOD’S opportunity* (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, July 1965, p.1).<sup>267</sup>

The technique at once elevates the writer’s own vision to the status of revelation – even Biblical revelation – and integrates it, even if only stylistically, with other, and older, traditions. It is, to this extent, a diachronic or historical integration, to match the synchronic mix of contemporary beliefs. Both vertically, in historical layers, and horizontally, reaching out to any number of parallel teachings, the Robinsons maximised an eclectic and integrationist practice.

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<sup>266</sup> Mary is clearly the writer of this text. She uses the word ‘I’ and ‘my’ on a number of occasions, even though not attributing the article to herself. The reader was expected to work out the authorship.

<sup>267</sup> J.B. Phillips is acknowledged as introducing the phrase ‘Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity’ (<http://www.ccel.org/bible/phillips/CN062-Tact.htm>, accessed 16.2.2010).



## **Eclectic, even Bizarre – but always Responsible**

It was indeed remarkable that the Robinsons took on so many issues at once, reading and then disseminating so much first-wave, alternative, life-style changing, organic, ecological and sustainability-oriented literature; while at the same time absorbing and distributing what can today be recognised as a bizarre collection of *channelture*. Much of the latter predicted that the cosmic clock was about to strike twelve, with what they saw as dire, but necessary and at the same time wonderfully joyous, consequences.

The following excerpt from the introduction to the July 1965 edition of *Shalam Light* positions Fred Robinson and Mary Broun as active ‘*Cultural Creatives*’ (Ray, 2000) in 1960s Australia. They encourage the reading of new publications in the area of natural living, working to inspire the ‘Masses’ – a word they capitalise, lifting it to the status of a key element in the overall programme of reform.

*For many years small groups of humanitarians have been demonstrating Right Living & Natural Healing, but now a pattern has been set upon the Ethers to correlate these groups into a Wider Pattern for the understanding & free use of the masses.*

*How can the Masses choose if they have no alternative from which to choose? And the little ‘NATURE’ Healing Groups have been obscured by the power of The Medical Profession.*

*A Natural Therapeutics Association – An International Body for the correlation of all forms of Natural Healing, was founded in England last year. A “Natural Therapeutics” Magazine is published quarterly, containing articles on all forms of Natural Healing of a high New-Age standard. Further information – Hon. Sec. N.T.A., ‘The Lodge’, Bantridge Forest, Balcombe, Sussex, Eng. (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, July 1965, p. 2).*

Mary would have been conscious that the ‘natural health magazines’ of the 1930s and ’40s were often naturist publications. The phrase ‘of a high New-Age standard’ was used to cover any possible confusion between this new and genuine ‘health magazine’, and those with similar names but (in her view) bogus content – such as *Health and Efficiency*, a naturist publication that Fred had far too much to do with during the 1930s and ’40s. The integrationist vision created problems, as Mary in particular worked to steer a coherent path through often incommensurable materials. Often the stylistic integration was all that held the New Age together – that, and the conviction with which each message was presented.

## On the Ethers

The following reveals how Mary made incoming ideas her own, while also recognising that others often appeared to have made *her* ideas *their* own, even before she arrived at her own revelation – and all without having any previous correspondence on the matter. Fred believed that picking up ideas that were already in the air was to be expected, since *idea-seeds* had already ‘*been planted on the ethers*’ (as Ione first described ‘*The Work*’ to Fred in the 1930s). Such *concurrent-idea-generation* or *the migration of ideas* is a study in its own right.<sup>268</sup>

*To read the Editorial of this Magazine is to read my own thoughts on this subject, for I have also been picking up the same ideas from The Ethers, and not only I but others from our community, for we now have in Perth a Natural Health Club for the very purpose I have been stating.*

*Doctors, Dentists, Naturopaths etc. are being drawn together for the one basic object of Natural Healing. This is a local movement, but so in tune is it with the wider International Movement, and with our own SHALAM pattern of Natural Living that we are convinced that this is part of the Pattern of ‘Things to Come’.*

*With the emerging of this wider pattern of Right Living & Natural Healing the Masses will be presented with an alternative for righting the effects of past errors – and so keep in step with the Purification of The Planet. The way lies open to the seeking heart, & he who is willing to co-operate with NATURE is being met along The Path (Broun, in Shalam Light, July 1965, p. 2).*

Mary finishes this section of the newsletter with quotations from *Natural Therapeutics*, outlining their aims and purposes:

*The work of the Association is to spread the knowledge of any and all aspects of the Natural Healing Arts in whatever sphere they lay [sic]. The Editor has observed for many years the vast growing interest in NATURAL ways to health and prevention of disease, as against the growing opposition to drugs, vivisection, harmful chemicals and the like. The Association is not formed to lay down the law on these matters, neither will there be any bias from one Therapeutics to another, a fact which is ever present in many similar Magazines. It has come to mind that ACTION is wanted to spread News and Views (Natural Therapeutics, in Shalam Light, July 1965, p. 2).*

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<sup>268</sup> This spiritual migration of ideas can be seen as a cousin of the less mystical idea that ‘Ideas migrate across time and space, sometimes in conjunction with the migration of people and sometimes independently of it’ (Roberto Scazzieri and Raffaella Simili (eds), *The Migration of Ideas* 2008, Foreword).

The capitalisation of the word ‘action’ and the proper-noun status given to ‘News’ and ‘Views’, were Robinsonian adaptation’s of the original text. Putting their own emphatic stamp on a text was something the Robinsons would not have thought twice about – just another technique for ‘spreading the knowledge’.

### **Extreme Balance**

The Robinsons felt they were doing, in the spiritual domain, what *Natural Therapeutics* was doing in the physical world. *Natural Therapeutics’* decision to take the ‘action’ of spreading ‘news and views’ without bias, is how the Robinsons saw their own task; but passing on the kind of information the Robinsons had been receiving was not the same. While much of the material they reprinted was designed to help promote *balance*, the writing itself was often extreme. Their publication of channellings that laid down *Universal Laws*, along with the cosmic predictions of ‘The End’, meant that the Robinsons were seen as persistent *doomsdayers* – which in fact they were not, even though they seemed to be. As editors of *Shalam Light* they didn’t think through the ramifications of the strongly-worded channelling they were reprinting in the spirit of passing on information. Extreme views, expressed in a tactless manner, can be seen next to quite reasonable articles, expressed with Mary’s sense of social and political propriety (a sense already compromised when she fell in love with Fred). Fred himself actively encouraged the inclusion of extreme dietary diatribes, a penchant for which he inherited from Max Heindel’s writings on *the purity of the bloodstream*.

The following excerpts of a message to New-Agers *came through* Sister Thedra, the channel and leader of The Association of Sananda and Sanat Kumara.<sup>269</sup> It was

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<sup>269</sup> The Association of Sananda and Sanat Kumara was founded in 1965 by the New Age channel Sister Thedra (see footnotes 219 and 232). This association was rooted in more than a decade of prior channelling activity. In the 1950s Martin had been the leader of an early UFO *contactee* group that became the subject (as Mrs Keech) of Leon Festinger’s *When Prophecy Fails* (1956). In 1954, after the disruption of the group in Illinois, she moved to Peru. She later explained that she had been healed by Sananda (Jesus) and was instructed to go to South America. Much of that time was spent at the Brotherhood of the Seven Rays, the Community established by fellow contactee George Hunt Williamson (a.k.a. *Brother Philip*, author of *The Secret of the Andes*, 1961). Sister Thedra returned to the United States in 1961 to settle in Arizona where she established the Association of Sananda and Sanat Kumara in 1965. A short time later she relocated to Mount Shasta, California. In 1988 she and the group returned to Sedona, Arizona. The association existed as a far-flung network of people who received the teachings of those who spoke through Sister Thedra. The beings she channelled were seen as both spiritually advanced and coming from outer space. Martin had a lengthy career as a channel and leader within the UFO *contactee* community; she died in 1992 at age 92 (<http://www.answers.com/topic/association-of-sananda-and-sanat-kumara>, accessed 16.2.2010).

reprinted in *Shalam Light* to give a *hurry-up* to recalcitrant Australian non-vegetarian readers, who might be more impressed if an Ascended Master told them, in no uncertain terms, to stop eating chops with their three vegetable evening meal:

*Now I say that to eat the flesh of the animal is not for THEE which I have Called Out ... I say ye have been given the lesser brothers that ye may lift them up: yet ye have slain them: and consumed the flesh thereof. I say such practices shall stop. I COMMAND OF THEE: BE YE NO PART OF THIS. For it is given unto me to know the results thereof. I say volumes could be written on this; yet mine word shall suffice thee; for to believe on Me, is to believe on MINE WORDS – Yet I say it shall suffice: for in the time of thine deliverance from darkness ye shall KNOW, even as I KNOW (Born, Brother of Sanat Kumara, through Sister Thedra, reprinted in *Shalam Light*, July 1965, pp. 5–6).*

In case the reader had not got the vegetarian message, Sister Thedra reiterates the point:

*Now I say ye shall eat of the grains of the fields; the berry of the vine; the nuts/seeds of all the grains; the leaves of the plants: the herbs and all manner of greens; Yet thou shalt NOT eat the flesh of the CARCASS – I say it is the dwelling place of the foul & putrid: and be ye no part of its decay and rot: I say it is not for thee.*

*... Oh, YE CHILDREN OF DARKNESS; HARKEN UNTO ME; For out of the fullness of mine love I come unto thee that ye may not suffer more.*

*I AM Thy Older Brother – Born (Brother of Sanat Kumara Ed.)  
Recorded by Sister Thedra (reprinted in *Shalam Light*, April 1965, p. 6).*

Fred Robinson revelled in a *no-holds-barred/no-pulling-punches* approach to spreading *The Truth*. The archaic language with its imperious tone adds *Old-Testament-Ten-Commandment* weight to this text, and further supports Fred's hard-line position on vegetarianism; one which Mary accepted for a decade, but dropped in the mid-1970s, when she saw some Community members struggling on a vegetarian diet.

That this text was both arrogant and tactless seems lost on Mary at that time – but then it would have been lost on me too, when in the early 1970s, my own *self-righteous-vegetarian-crusader-self* was in the ascendancy. In the thrall of Fred's extreme-purification regime it was always helpful to read equally extreme confirmations from other like-minded faddists, or some *divine being* – and all designed to bring about another ideal of Fred's – *PERFECT BALANCE !*

This constant drive to hold so many impulses towards the absolute in some sort of harmonious integration needs constant justificatory labour. The word ‘instrument’ (one of the terms used to describe a channel), is one of the tools for this work. Sister Thedra in the above text claims to be employed by a visionary called Born, who uses her as an *instrument*. In this way she can impart her own fiercely held vegetarian idealism. This intense delivery of a channelled message is justified by the love the source is said to have for the recipients of the message.

With a *Divine Being* laying down the law ‘*through her*’ rather than ‘*for her*’, the channel is protected as the front-line communicant. Fred and Mary, as the editors of *Shalam Light*, reprinted many such extreme channelling messages, so share the responsibility for the effect that this kind of channelling may have had on their readership. Yet they too are just mediators. Even though they liked to think they had discriminated (they told me they had refused to reprint a substantial amount of material) checking and verifying the divine sources of a channel was beyond the Robinsons. They were trusting, idealistic and too full of missionary zeal for the always *impending New Age*. While believing that looking for faults wasn’t a methodology for finding truth, the truth was they *wanted to believe* in the channelled propositions that supported their already held beliefs – but of course the word ‘belief’ was out of bounds when one could intuitively ‘know’ the truth.

## **Understanding and Appreciating Channels**

The March 1965 *Shalam Light* was mainly devoted to the reprinting of Ethera Prins’s channelling. Mary had visited Ethera, and had formed a real friendship. In the introductory editorial Fred addresses a criticism from one of their readers. Fred refers to his own experience of revelation with Ione, his first teacher:

*Again we have made this a special issue to give you an opportunity to become familiar with the Channelling of Ethera Prins.*

*One of our readers wrote to say that Ethera makes such tremendous claims that they are very difficult to accept. Granted – but then the same applies to The Prophet of Tabuse and an ever increasing number of wonderful souls who incarnated at this critical time to act as intermediaries between man and God.*

*I had the privilege of working in close association with such an one, for many years, and I know a little, first hand, of the great sacrifice such a soul makes in*

*voluntarily coming down into this low 3 dimensional vibration in an endeavour to assist mankind through their abysmal ignorance of GOD's Plan for the well being of the human race.*

*I speedily found out that there are many aspects in the life of such a high raised soul that cannot be discussed with Understanding with the average human of my acquaintance. It is bad enough now, but 30 years ago it was simply a case of keeping a stiff upper lip and a quiet tongue, even tho' bursting to convey wonderful Gems of Revealed Knowledge to all Mankind (Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, March 1965, p. 1).*

Knowing and respecting those who make powerful but unsubstantiated claims or channel controversial material makes life difficult for those in their orbit. Fred and Mary respected and reprinted what the channels of the Universal Link Movement said, and to varying degrees believed in them all – especially because they appeared to be saying much the same things concerning a single date: Christmas Eve 1967.

## **Ogamisama's Envoy**

Early in 1966 an overseas visitor to Shalam was to change the course of Fred and Mary's life. 'Change' had become a constant factor in their lives, just as it was to become an endemic, exhausting, and perhaps unwise, part of the Universal Brotherhood's lifestyle. The following excerpts are part of a longer introduction to a change in direction Fred and Mary were about to explain to their readers, already subject to a plethora of directions in which they had already been taken by the ever-enthusiastic, yet weary editors of *Shalam Light*:

*Dear Friends:-*

*This is an open letter to all New-Age students in Australia.*

*In place of our usual monthly Journal we are sending out to you the small Booklet "PLANET MERCURY SENDS GREETINGS". It can be read easily and quickly. We hope you will do so – no matter how busy you may be – and decide to take some positive action in regard to the information contained therein (Broun & Robinson, in *Shalam Newsletter*, January 16 1966, pp. 1–2).*

This booklet of greetings from the planet Mercury would be a major surprise to most people. Slotted in to the familiar mix of channelled messages and extreme programmes of lifestyle reform, with an encouragement to read it and do something about it, it appears just part of a continuum.

*We have been preaching for a **very long weary time** that “Growth is The Law of Life” – Growth means CONSTANT CHANGE. We have proved this to be true to our own complete satisfaction ... LIFE demands ACTION – RIGHT ACTION...*

*We were just getting our breath back, at ‘SHALAM’ after the Xmas rush, when out of a blue sky, a young man, – Alex Langhof – landed at our quiet Sanctuary.*

*We would have been justified in thinking he had landed from a ‘Flying Saucer’ if it were not for the fact that we met him at Perth Airport at 3 a.m. on the 4<sup>th</sup> of January.*

*He was not with us very long – 10 days – but in that time we discovered that we had a decision to make, for he was an emissary of OGAMISAMA – The prophet of TABUSE and we have been convinced for some years that she is one of the purest Channels on this Planet...*

*Now that we have seen Alex on his way, we have made our decision to Change our method of working with and for GOD (Broun & Robinson, in *Shalam* Newsletter, January 16 1966, pp. 1–2).*

This was a major step for the Robinsons, for it heralded a direct affiliation with another teacher and another organisation. Until this point they had a loose affiliation with many groups but an independence from all of them. Here they seem to be aligning themselves directly with Ogamisama.

## **Fools for God**

As a free-lance linking agent of *New Age Light Centres* Alex Langhof’s zeal in spreading Ogamisama’s teachings was congruent with what Mary Broun and Fred Robinson believed God wanted them to be and to do. Alex Langhof was a catalyst’s catalyst:<sup>270</sup>

*He [God] speaks to us through the mouth of OGAMISAMA in our own language. He wants us to become simple fools (not stupid fools) so that HE can work through us quite easily (Broun & Robinson, in *Shalam* Newsletter, January 16 1966, p. 2).*

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<sup>270</sup> Alex Langhof was among the most active New Age Missionaries in the world during the 1960s, ’70s and ’80s. I spent a considerable amount of time with him when he visited the Community on at least three occasions. One of his 1982 lectures was advertised in Melbourne’s *The Age*:

Alex Langhof from U.S.A. is on his 6<sup>th</sup> Australian New Age Communication Tour, 12<sup>th</sup> World Peace Mission, to give a talk on New Age Communities. THE TEMPLE OF SHAN FOUNDATION, 56 St. George Rd. Elsternwick, 7.30 pm, 10<sup>th</sup> June (9.6.1982, p. 23).

The Buddhist organisation, The Temple of Shan, was providing the venue for his talk, in much the same way as Shalam had done in Perth. Alex’s energy for *linking*, talking and showing slides of New Age groups was unbounded. Langhof functioned on the same ‘love-offering’ basis as the Robinsons. From what I gathered, he would stay with one host as long as it took to find a sponsor to send him on to his next destination – eventually ‘God’, in the guise of ‘someone’, would provide.

This idea of *being a fool for God* was an important plank in Shalam's developing schema. Fred saw this aspect of Mary's training as 'God's instrument' as something he had himself already mastered:

*So far as the writer is concerned, as I said to Mary a little while ago, 'I am one jump ahead of it, for I AM a simple fool & thankful that I am; for I long ago recognised the Truth in the saying 'God Makes use of fools to confound the worldly wise'.<sup>271</sup> So we are now writing to Ogamisama to ask her to use 'SHALAM' as a focussing point of GOD'S Teaching through her for West Australia...*

*Those of you who have responded to the messages coming through any of the established Channels of the Western World we have drawn your attention to, can write direct to your favourite Channel, if you have not already done so. Until further guidance is given to us we will devote our time, energy and resources to making known The Teaching coming through OGAMISAMA – THE PROPHET OF TABUSE (Robinson, in Shalam Newsletter, January 16 1966, p. 2).*

Fred had always believed that Australia (*Austral-Aquarius* as he called it) would play a special part in *The Cosmic Plan* – an idea which had originated with Ione Long in the 1930s. He saw their decision to propagate Ogamisama's teachings in Australia as leading to the fulfilment of this long-held hope:

*Kipling was wrong, in our opinion, when he wrote "East is East & West is West & never the twain shall meet". It is part of the Divine Plan That East and West meet and blend in this Eastern Continent, peopled by The Western people – all according to HIS Plan (Robinson, in Shalam Newsletter, January 16 1966, p. 3).*

There was however another reason that made Ogamisama particularly attractive to Fred: she confirmed his prophetic *in-the-twinkling-of-an-eye* prediction/predilection that the New-Age would begin both suddenly and very soon – and it must have been an inspiration to him to read the incoming channelling of 1965 and 1966: 'almost every message we get indicates that The Great CHANGE is just around the corner' (Robinson, in *Shalam Newsletter*, January 16 1966, p. 4).

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<sup>271</sup> This quotation is derived from 1 Corinthians 1:27: 'But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty' (KJV). For dramatic purposes Shakespeare often exalted the fool by employing much the same idea in a number of his plays: 'That, of course, is the great secret of the successful fool - that he is no fool at all' (Isaac Asimov, 'Who is the Fool', *Guide to Shakespeare*, <http://mypoofool.wikispaces.com/Fool>, accessed 14.9.20110; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespearian\\_fool#List\\_of\\_Shakespearian\\_fools](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespearian_fool#List_of_Shakespearian_fools), accessed 18.2.2010).



## Special Cosmic Bulletin

By early 1966 the Universal Link Movement had become an international phenomenon amongst the New Age groups and their Channels. The theory of *memes* (Dawkins 1976), shows how such a belief became pandemic amongst the *in-the-twinkling-of-an-eye* New Age *world-within-a-world* of the 1960s. This same *Shalam Newsletter* (January 16<sup>th</sup> 1966) reprinted a section from a channel entitled ‘SPECIAL COSMIC BULLETIN’:

**MASS CHRIST TIDE:**  
*UNIFICATION OF MASS CHRIST TIDE IS SUBTLY SWALLOWING UP THE PISCAN “CHRISTMAS TIDE.” (Eolia. Engineer of the Great Central Sun) (through Evangeline, in Shalam Newsletter, January 1966, p. 3).*

The not so subtle clarion call goes out to all *Australasians* as a kind of advertisement for the anticipated planetary appearance of Limitless Love and Truth – once again in capital letters:

*CLEAR THE COAST OF CHRIST CONSCIOUSNESS FOR THE ENTRANCE ON EARTH OF “LIMITLESS LOVE AND TRUTH” COMING “MASS CHRIST TIDE” DEC. 25<sup>th</sup> 1967. (Message given to Evangeline in a streak of lightning) (ibid., p. 4).*

As if this were not enough to digest, Fred goes on to include some news on Evangeline’s latest channelling ‘service’ to mankind:

*Most of you will be interested to hear that ‘Evangeline’ has been asked to serve as a Channel exclusively for EOLIA (St. Germain) – Limitless Love & Truth – The Archangel Michael & Sanada (ibid.).*

This was all presented as an intertext between Fred’s story about Alex Langhof and the announcement of their decision to focus on Ogamisama’s ‘simple teachings’, and a prophecy which Ogamisama had apparently made. Fred was quick in linking Ogamisama’s prophecy with the Universal Link’s Christmas 1967 date – a moment on which Fred had his own undivided and prophetic *twinkling-eye*:

*One of OGAMISAMA’S recent prophecies is to the effect that the Third World War will last 3 days & I would not be surprised if it coincides with The Master Limitless Love & Truth revealing HIMSELF to the World by Xmas 1967 (Robinson, in Shalam Newsletter, January, 16 1966, p. 3).<sup>272</sup>*

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<sup>272</sup> I remember Mary telling me that when the Atomic Bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1945, Ogamisama’s reaction was both calm and unusual: ‘The Atomic Bomb is sitting right here eating her gruel!’ (Mary Robinson, pers. comm., 1972). I was quite taken aback at the time. Understandably I did not know quite what to think, other than that these mystics were very odd.

The frenetic nature of the prophetic *Cosmic Chanellings* and the wild jumps in logic were becoming exhausting. All were to be embraced and enacted, with equal vigour. However, even at the height of their period of prophetic intensity some of their own writing reiterated their initial focus on their basic teachings about *unselfish loving service*:

*Unselfish Service is the Golden Key which opens the door to HIS GARDEN. This can only be done by those who are willing to put the simple teaching of Ogamisama into operation & Polish their own Soul and purify the physical body by adherence to The Natural Laws of Life* (Robinson in *Shalam Newsletter*, January 1966, p. 4).

The *Shalam Lights* of 1966 reveal news about Mary and her experiences with Ogamisama that provide a wider picture of Fred Robinson's and Mary Broun's lives during the years before I knew them. Mary's journal writing in particular, gives a greater understanding of her and the *soul-polishing* mentioned in 'The Brotherhood' (Critchley 2009).

## **Soul-Polishing in Japan**

In a February 1966 *Shalam Newsletter* Mary was getting ready to visit Ogamisama at The World Temple of Peace, at Hon-bu. Fred mentions that Mary would 'depart the Perth Airdrome at 2.30 p.m. on the 16<sup>th</sup> of February' and would fly to Hiroshima. A regular visitor to Shalam, Cecil Bethel, had offered to pay for Mary to make the trip.<sup>273</sup> On the way to Japan Mary would also visit a Dr. C.H. Yeang in Malaya, a regular correspondent with the Robinsons. Here she would discuss *the Spiritual Hierarchy of the Planet*.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Cecil and Julie Bethel were, during the 1960s, one of the major financial supporters of Shalam. They visited the Universal Brotherhood Community at Balingup on a number of occasions and attended Fred's Funeral in 1983.

<sup>274</sup> Dr CH Yeang was influential in the emergence of the Ruby Focus of Magnificent Consummation teachings. Yeang agreed with the Bridge to Freedom teaching, that over the years a number of changes had occurred in the makeup of the spiritual hierarchy. He wrote a book entitled *Who Am I? I Am That I Am* (1965, privately published) ([http://www.novelguide.com/a/discover/ear\\_01/ear\\_01\\_00146.html](http://www.novelguide.com/a/discover/ear_01/ear_01_00146.html), accessed 18.2.2010).

Some of Mary's journal writings about her experiences with Ogamisama were recorded in the June 1966 *Shalam Light*. It was at Fred's insistence these were sent out to their readership:

*My Partner, Mary, has been expressing concern about me taking up so much of the space in this issue with her writings. I pointed out to her that I had no option. Our Friends throughout Australasia have been writing to me for months past wanting a first-hand account of her experiences during the 3 months she was in Malaya, the Philippines & Japan. And what better way for me to do that than to utilise what she had written in her own Journal. It would have been foolish to do otherwise (Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, June 1966, p. 18).*

Mary's journal entries provide a useful autoethnographic account of the changes she made as she absorbed the teachings of Ogamisama at the Temple of Peace in Hon-bu. Mary introduces these journal entries with an overview of her stay:

*It was really only within the last few days of my stay at Hon-bu that I saw this place as a Finishing School for Souls; seeing it in this light, made many things understandable that were not so previously. The Discipline, for one thing, is equivalent to any other school, and only when it can be taken in this light can it be properly adjusted to – at least that is how it seems to me (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, June 1966, p. 18).*

A *Finishing School* was one of the ways that Mary saw the UBI Community, otherwise conceived of as a *New Age College*, *God's University*, *Modern Monastery* or simply a *School of Experience*, in which those who were drawn there, presumably by God, could 'polish their souls'. Mary saw her disciplining of Community members in much the same light as she came to understand the discipline she received under Ogamisama. Mary believed that those who were humble enough to accept their role as student, and study the spiritual lessons she gave, were those who chose themselves as *in-the-consciousness* Members, who would be rewarded by feelings of spiritual growth and the recognition of character development. Most of those who bucked the idea of *soul-polishing* quickly became disgruntled and left. Mary was quick to identify issues that would need correcting if a person was to 'fit into the vibration' of the Community in order to become 'part of the consciousness' (both these phrases became part of the UBI idiom). The following extract reveals how Mary experienced and understood her own *soul-polishing* under Ogamisama:

**HOSPITAL OF THE SOUL:** *This is indeed a Hospital of the Soul, for it is here that all adjustments can be made – if one is willing to apply the simple Teachings ...*

*The X-Ray eyes of Ogamisama penetrate to the cause of complaints, and by Her diagnosis She quickly puts her finger on the spot. The disciplinary meetings & exercises all serve as a restoration of the Soul (Broun, in Shalam Light, June 1966, p. 16).*

Mary Broun strongly believed in following one's conscience to the nth degree. She was punctilious and scrupulous. While I came to disagree with many of Mary's positions and decisions, and became acutely conscious of qualities she lacked, I never doubted her sincerity in trying to do what she believed was in the best interests of everyone involved in any given situation. Mary practised loving selfless service, and sincerely lived the soul qualities she recommended to those in her orbit in an effort to *raise their vibration* – even when this was not appreciated:

**POLISHING THE SOUL:** *This could be the mechanics of the raising of one's vibrations. It is the little things that combine to form our pattern of living. As you behave towards the crumbs you spill upon the floor, or the way you greet the little boy next door, so would you behave if you were King and asked to go to war; or had the job of raising taxes or paying out the balance. Soul qualities cannot be judged by what is done, but by the way in which they are done.*

*Loving selfless Service is The KEY to the Polishing of the Soul – or this is how it seems to me (Broun, in Shalam Light, June 1966, p. 16).*

Mary's recognition of her own 'overactive mentality' led her to spend hours in silence and in the contemplation of the issues before her. She did not accept the dreams and guidance she received without making the effort to still her ego and strictly follow her conscience:

**NON-EGO:** *Man was originally constituted to live in GOD as a fish lives in water – completely dependent upon the Spirit of GOD by means of the inherent faculty of Conscience ... The Ego has been over-activated. For man to develop a proper balance he needs to still the ego and activate The Conscience – The still Small Voice Within. One of my great failings has been the intrusion of an overactive mentality. "Let go and Let GOD" is an attitude that helps (Broun, in Shalam Light, June 1966, p. 15).*

Mary was more self-reflective than her critics have suggested; she worked hard to overcome personal blockages and impediments to her ability to be of service. At Ogamisama's Temple of Peace, she came to terms with her inherent lack of confidence:

**BLOCKAGES:** *I came to Hon-bu with blockages I didn't understand. I found them flowing from me, but I still didn't know the reason why. I came to the Hospital of the Soul, where Humility is taught, where one learns to be a 'simple fool', but all I seemed to gain was confidence.*

*This puzzled me awhile, until one day I saw the reason why – my blockage was self-consciousness, and this, of course, is based on fear. As the fear began to melt and 'self' began to take its rightful place, the GOD within shone forth, and gave me confidence (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, June 1966, p. 16).*

Being extremely self-conscious for most of her life, the idea of standing out from the crowd was initially anathema to Mary, but as she grew spiritually she didn't care so much what people thought of her. Being Fred's partner Mary soon needed to develop a pretty thick skin. By the time I met her she could laugh about the probability that she was being laughed about. She wore the badge of the simple fool with pride:

**TO BE A SIMPLE FOOL:** *This statement of Ogamisama's always sounds to me like the Teachings of Jesus, when HE said "unless ye become again as a little child ye can no wise enter The Kingdom of God" ... Simplicity combined with Sincerity. A child-like nature says what it sees, and does what it says. It is empty of intrigue and preconceived conceptions. It is spontaneous, and not concerned with creating impressions (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, June 1966, pp. 15–16).*

At Ogamisama's Temple Mary thought a lot about what God's Kingdom was – and what it was not. In the May 1966 *Shalam Light* Mary wrote: 'First let us see what it is not. It is not a place where you would drop a match and leave it there for someone else to pick up ...' (ibid. p. 9). The idea that the little things were very important was a key consideration in the later Universal Brotherhood; but while this understanding ensured integrity, sometimes it went too far. Mountains were made of molehills, causing more dissention than some small issues were worth. Here, extracts from a much longer and poetic text reveal something of the importance Mary came to place on 'little things':

**'TIS THE LITTLE THINGS THAT COUNT :**  
*The little things are taken very seriously in this 'HOSPITAL OF THE SOUL',  
for a tiny cut can quickly become infected if it's not attended to.  
Many times I've found myself committing little crimes,  
for the LIGHT in this abode is very brightly lit.*

*Little crumbs make cakes, and matches make a tree;  
grains of sand a mountain forms, and thoughts are solid sort of things.  
Thoughts, Words and Actions are three corners of a tripod,  
and they must balance evenly, if they are to stand.*

*Exaggeration is a pit-fall, and little white lies tend to grow and multiply.  
A 'Simple Fool' knows nothing of intrigue...  
To live as though your every thought was known is the way to 'Polish up your  
Soul', for higher vibrations claim a finer balance set.  
But knowing doesn't really get us very far;  
It's the doing what we know that covers up the cracks.  
Gratitude to GOD, and to the ones with whom we work,  
makes a right relationship, and brings the best up to the top.*

*I used to think that I was very honest till I stepped into this bright Light –  
but here all the smudgy bits show up.  
To compromise with righteousness is to sell your Soul for silver.  
Not even gold is worth a little lie, for gold cannot buy you into heaven –  
And this, we hope, is where we all are heading.  
M.A.B. (Broun, in *Shalam Light*, June 1966, p. 11).*

Such journal entries, half-poetry, half-prose, are useful in tracking the genesis of themes which affected both the readership of *Shalam Light* at the time, and the members of the Universal Brotherhood Community during the 1970s and '80s. The themes, issues and the phraseology of the maxims contained in these writings would be familiar to those who lived in the Community.

The final entry in this section deals with the immediate effect of Mary's pilgrimage on her own way of thinking, as well as her gratitude for the experience. The attitude to living, along with the 'goodness' which she felt at the Hon-bu Temple of Peace was something Mary consciously attempted to instil in the members of the Universal Brotherhood Community:

**MY SPIRITUAL HOMELAND:**

*The kindness of these friendly folk.*

*The cleanliness, the order and the beauty of this lovely land, all serve to win my heart.*

*God is in this Holy place, for I see HIM in the trees in the faces of the Doshies,<sup>275</sup>*

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<sup>275</sup> 'Doshi' was the in-house term used at Ogamisama's temple to denote members of Ogamisama's live-in congregation; the term is a synonym for 'adherent', 'follower', 'devotee', 'disciple' or 'chela' (the latter word 'Chela' is often used to describe those dedicated to the New Age teachings of Ascended Masters). Interestingly the words 'chela' and 'doshi' have some similar etymological connections that might say something about the roots of *followership* and *soul-polishing* within the religious domain: 'chela' is derived from the Hindi: 'cela' (from Sanskrit 'ceta'), meaning 'slave' or 'servant'. In English 'chela' means a religious student or disciple (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chela>, accessed 12.10.2010). One of the more obscure meanings of the word 'doshi' ...taken literally from the Hindu word *dosh* (meaning in this case guilt), defines *doshi* as someone who has been found guilty of a crime (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doshi>, accessed 12.10.2010). The connections between *guilt*, being a *slave* for God, and *soul-polishing* within a religious *regime of fitness* are interesting.

*and in the majesty of Ogamisama...*

*This Spiritual Homeland of the Soul is a little taste of Heaven.*

*This dream of what can be I'll take along with me, and see what God can do through me, with my own dear Folk at home.*

*To spread this idea far and wide, that God has come to supervise HIS Kingdom on the Earth – where Purity and Righteousness are worn for daily use, and not just kept for special times, as it has been in the past.*

*A new Fashion there shall be, a Fashion to be GOOD, where one is glad to wear the label "Purity".*

*Dear Spiritual Homeland of The Soul, my grateful thanks is ever thine, for all you've done for me and mine.*

*Sayonara ...*

*Mary of 'SHALAM' (Broun, in Shalam Light, June 1966, p. 18).*

Mary, like Fred, was now moving towards the formal establishment of her own spiritual homeland.

## **Australia's New Age Religious Representatives**

In 1966 the Sydney journalist Tess van Sommers had her *PIX* articles on the religious beliefs practised in Australia published together.<sup>276</sup> Her book, *Religions in Australia: The PIX series extended to 41 beliefs* (1966), contains a chapter about Fred Robinson

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<sup>276</sup> Tess van Sommers (1919-2011) graduated from Sydney University in 1944. From the early 1940s to 1966 she was a journalist, feature writer, columnist, author and literary critic. At times she wrote under the pseudonym of Vanessa Brown. In 1966 she became Executive Editor of Books for Reader's Digest, Australia. During 1967 she worked in New York for *Readers' Digest*. She published a number of books including *Sydney Sketchbook* (1965), *Religions in Australia* (1966), *Historic Parramatta* (1978) and *Sydney Harbour* (1981). As a columnist she wrote a weekly humorous piece for *The Sun* (Sydney) called 'Of All Things'. Other weekly columns were 'Book Talk' and 'Point of View'. She married the journalist and yachting writer Lou d'Alpuget, father of the novelist and biographer Blanche d'Alpuget (<http://acms.sl.nsw.gov.au/item/itemDetailPaged.aspx?itemID=131410>, accessed 9.3.2010).

I spoke on the phone, and corresponded with Tess van Sommers in 2005 and 2006. She verified that the Robinsons had authorised the text for her book, and told me the history of the publishing of this atypical religious series published by *Pix*, which documented the stories of most of the religions in Australia at the time of her writing – all checked by the groups concerned as to the veracity of her representations. Van Sommers commented that she particularly liked dealing with the small religious groups she researched. So sympathetic was she to them, that all of them held out hopes that she might join their particular religion. I remember Fred and Mary telling me, when I asked them about this *coffee-table-book*, that its author was 'right on the ball' (pers. comm., 1972).

An article on her work, using her restricted memoirs and manuscripts held in the State Library of NSW, would make a useful contribution to the literature on Religions in Australia during the mid-1960s.

and Mary Broun which was authorised by them during the research process sometime in 1965. I remember them telling me they had authorised van Sommers' chapter on them. Titled 'Shalam – The New Age' (pp. 205–209) this was the *Robinsonsian* version of the New Age, and the one which van Sommers documented as representing Australia's New Age Aquarian Movement of the period. If van Sommers was right, then this was the peak moment of a formation which had developed over a very long period, and which intersected a vast number of sources and influences.

### **The 31<sup>st</sup> of March 1848**

The gestation of the Australian movement begins where Fred began, with the year which pin-pointed the roots of the modern New Age at the start of two way communication between the spirit world and humans. Fred used to mention the actual date as being 31st March 1848.<sup>277</sup>

For adherents of the New Age Movement and other small groups in Australia and overseas who share their beliefs, the year 1848 has special significance. In that year, they believe, spirit beings in worlds beyond this planet began to communicate to mankind a God-inspired plan for the reformation of humanity and for a new, perfected regime of holiness and happiness on earth.

The first messages about this new order, they believe, were dictated by Jesus of Nazareth to an American spiritualist medium and published in 1852 in the United States under the title of *The History of the Origin of All Things* (Van Sommers 1966, p. 205).

The full title of the latest publication of this book is *The History of the Origin of All Things Given by the Lord our God through Levi M. Arnold 1852, Revised by Him Through Anna A MacDonald* (1961). Like so many other New Age impulses, this text intersects existing beliefs with new techniques of revelation, appropriating the power of established institutions to the new. It was a technique which would be employed in successive waves of transmission.

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<sup>277</sup> This aligns with the Fox sisters' 'rappings' in Hydesville on that date (see footnote 23) ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fox\\_sisters#Hydesville\\_events](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fox_sisters#Hydesville_events), accessed, 17.3.2010). As already mentioned, 1848 is also the year Newbrough's *Oahspe* chooses to begin its own dating system: 1848 being the first year of 'the Kosmon Era'.



## **Oahspe: The Kosmon Bible**

Van Sommers continues by describing the next book, which Fred believed defined the New Age Movement:

The second codified body of knowledge communicated to man from the spirit world was, according to these believers, *The Kosmon Bible – Oahspe* (1882) a title loosely translated as meaning ‘A Revelation of the Universe and its Creator.’ This book which was published in America in 1882, was the work of John Ballou Newbrough. Followers of the New Age Movement believe that it was dictated to him by ‘various groups of angelic beings whom God had instructed to throw open the libraries of heaven to mortals on earth’ [quote not referenced] (Van Sommers 1966, p. 205).

The following paragraph explains something of why the Robinsons championed so many channels during the 1960s – an *Oahspean-imprimatur*:

The Oahspe Book told how, sixteen generations previously, those angelic beings in charge of the procreation of mortals on the planet Earth were instructed by God to supervise the union of certain humans and to bring into existence a race of super-sensitive people. This new type of mortal, the book said, would teach the message of man’s new destiny and act as channels for divine information from heaven to earth. Eventually some would become the administrators who would assist Jesus to establish a new era, or Golden Age, on earth (Van Sommers 1966, p. 205).

While there may have only been a couple of dozen people in Australia believing any of the above (and this is perhaps a generous *gestimate*), as both students of either *Oahspe* and/or Fred Robinson’s more developed schema, these people defined the ‘New Age Movement’ in the eyes of van Sommers. The content of the following paragraph certainly defined the lives of thousands of my generation, who, after hearing Fred Robinson in the 1970s, decided to live simply on the land with like-minded people, preparing themselves for their destiny as New Agers by undertaking a *regime of fitness*:

The book described how people who wanted to prepare themselves for the coming New Age should form into groups living a simple community existence and, by vegetarianism and other types of self-discipline, and meditation, should “cleanse” their body and souls (ibid.).

Van Sommers gives a short account of the history of the *Oahspe* inspired Kosmon Church, from its inception in London in 1912, and its development in Canada. The Australian Kosmon Church, established in 1928 in Sydney, was relatively short lived:

‘attempts to publicise its message were soon abandoned’ (ibid.). However, there were small cells of *Faithists* (the name the book gives to its adherents) who continued the *Oahspean* tradition. The following paragraph mentions Fred in this Kosmon Church context, while depicting Shalam as an active movement:

One such individual, Mr. Fred Robinson, of Western Australia, who was converted to New Age beliefs in 1936, has become one of the leaders of a small group in Perth sub-titled Shalam. This is now the most active proselytising agent for the faith in Australia, holding regular meetings, and issuing a considerable body of mailed literature to contacts (Van Sommers 1966, p. 206).

### **The Urantia Book**

Following Fred’s own trajectory in the development of his schema van Sommers adds the *Urantia Book* to the story of the New Age in Australia:

In 1956 a further work believed by New Age followers to be inspired revelation from God to man, was published in the United States. Running to about half a million words, it sells in America at the equivalent of approximately £8/10/0. It is entitled *The Urantia Book*, but has no author quoted on the title page. Each of its numerous sections is attributed to the dictation of angelic beings, but to whom the dictation was made is not stated. *The Urantia Book* is a work of enormous complexity. It describes in minute detail a universal cosmology, and retells major parts of the Old and New Testaments in new terms, some of them evocative of what is popularly known as “science fiction” (Van Sommers 1966, p. 206).

Van Sommers attempts to summarise some of *The Urantia Book*’s explanations of the administration of the Cosmos and the names of the various beings administering it, thus demonstrating the science fiction elements. Fred and Mary would not have objected too much, for they considered that science fiction had a valuable connection with ‘Truth’ – which was yet stranger than fiction. Van Sommers is able to connect her summary of *Urantian* teachings about angels becoming people, and the more recent revelations which *Shalam* was publishing from ‘channels’. It has to be said that van Sommers’ 350 word summary (not all included here) would be considered inaccurate by students of *The Urantia Book*:

Some of the angels also become incarnate as human beings, the book states, and these become great masters or teachers, with psychic powers. More frequently, however, the work of spreading the message about the New Age is done by ordinary humans who, by conviction, become “channels” or links in the chain of supernatural knowledge. Information from the spirit world may come to these people in the form of dreams. Others, in recent years, have received it through television sets when no human television stations have been transmitting (ibid., pp. 206–7).

*Urantia Book* readers of the period would have been appalled at this summary. From Rosicrucians to Ufologists, adherents of causes Fred espoused came to regret his ability to attract publicity and to set in motion press articles that misrepresented their movement's teachings. Fred remained unaligned, eclectic, and dealt in broad brush stroke ideas. He cared little about inaccuracies regarding specific theological positions.

### **Summary of 'New Age' Beliefs**

The following additional points made by van Sommers as being beliefs of the New Age Movement as it existed in Australia at the time of writing, are summarised here:

- On February 4, 1962 the New Aquarian Age was inaugurated and 'purifying' cosmic rays bombarded Earth
- Spiritual beings from other universes are visiting earth in Flying Saucers and other spacecraft
- In about 20 years from 1964 another evolutionary cycle will terminate, leading to the end of the world; at that time the 'lost continent of Lemuria' which formally supported an ideal civilisation, will rise again from the Pacific Ocean, allowing Pacific nations to play a major part in the "mass awakening"
- 10,000 highly evolved children were born in 1962 (in the USA and Australia) and their "soul-vibrations" are of a much higher rate than most people
- St. Germain, chief Ascended Master of the Great White Brotherhood with special interest in earth affairs, was in charge of ritual and dictated innumerable messages to humans with psychic powers
- The Universal Link at St Anne's-on-sea had become a place of pilgrimage where a chalice, known as The Font, miraculously fills with a sacred liquid. At Woking (England) a painting of an angel had been weeping real tears
- New Agers are conscientious objectors obeying the teachings of Jesus Christ (Van Sommers 1966, pp. 207–208).

There were no doubt numbers of people who regarded themselves as 'New Agers' who were unhappy about being aligned with this list. However, it is the Robinsons who were most publicly representing the Australian New Age.

### **Shalam: Australia's Chief New Age Information Centre**

The following sections of this study clearly place Shalam as the key New Age centre in Australia at the time. This chapter was seen as something of a coup for Mary Broun and Fred Robinson, even though the content made their belief system look like a hotch-potch of cosmic concepts:

The chief "co-ordinating information centre" in Australia for spreading the word of developments in the cosmic plan for earth is Shalam ("a place of peace"), at Armadale, Western Australia. Shalam is a five-acre farm run by Mr Fred Robinson and Mrs Mary Broun. They are strict vegetarians, non-smokers,

and non-drinkers. They grow all their own food, without use of artificial manures or insecticides, which they preach against as poisonous to man. At Shalam is a Sanctuary, where groups of adherents and “sincere seekers after truth” are admitted to private devotions held on a group basis, sometimes once a fortnight. An average attendance is usually about twenty people.

The nature of the New Age devotions is described as “too sacred to be placed before unbelievers”. The meetings are held in front of an alter which carries drawings made by clairvoyant artists of various Ascended Masters of The Great White Brotherhood, a special company of celestial beings believed to take a special interest in affairs upon earth, and sometimes to incarnate as humans (Van Sommers 1996, pp. 207–8).

Having taken part in, and indeed having presided over the descendant forms of these devotions during the 1970s, it is strange to see them described as ‘too sacred’ for unbelievers. Perhaps the close connection Mary still had with the I AM Activity led to this statement, for that movement was esoteric. Fred however was stridently exoteric; ‘no secrets!’ was almost a catch call that had become embedded in him since his Max Heindel days. By the time I was officiating at services anyone who came was welcome.

Spiritual exercises at Shalam include fasting, affirmative prayer, and a type of mental effort which might be described as thought transference. The devotee concentrates on sending out rays of thought of various colours (violet is regarded as especially efficacious) to help “cleanse” and uplift mankind in general (Van Sommers 1996, p. 208).

The chapter finishes by exploring the network of which Shalam was part. It is this ‘linking’ work and the reprinting of information from other groups that makes Shalam so interesting. They were not promoters only of their own philosophies and ‘Truths’:

They have a strong sense of identity with groups of like beliefs, which they claim are scattered in increasing numbers throughout the world. These include the society known as Unidentified Flying Objects International, and all Flying Saucer groups which will accept affiliation with religious bodies.

The Shalam centre in Perth lists among its correspondents, in Australia and overseas, the following groups of like mind: The Heralds of the New Age (Auckland New Zealand); The Prophet of Tabuse; The Summit Lighthouse; The Unification Church; The Mark-Age; Sologa; The Magnificent Consummation; The White Star; The Christ Ministry Foundation; The Bridge to Freedom. Any of these groups find a welcome in Australia, to swell the work of information being done by Shalam and the I AM Movement, and from time to time there have been visitors from some of them (Van Sommers, p. 208).

The Robinsons' credentials as Australia's most prominent New Age Information Centre during the 1960s are clear. No other group had such a comprehensive network of New Age contacts. The Robinsons were thus cemented as the most credentialed authorities on the New Age Movement in Australia. Fred Robinson had been around the *Aquarian New Age* traps since the 1930s, and Mary Broun, having been around the world to meet some of the key personalities bringing in this New Age, had now done her own apprenticeship. Together Fred and Mary felt they were ready to teach more widely and publicly.



## Chapter 10: Marriage and Lecture Tours 1966–67

In the introductory editorial to the June 1966 edition of *Shalam Light* Fred announced their plans:

*Today we have a Happy Announcement to make. The way has opened up for Mary & I to be married, and on the 13<sup>th</sup> August, this long awaited event will take place. All details have not yet been finalised, but we will be leaving on the evening of the same day for a Honeymoon Lecture Tour of the Eastern States and possibly New Zealand (Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, June 1966, p. 1).*

The very idea of a ‘Honeymoon Lecture Tour’ typifies Fred and Mary’s attitude to life: everything was fitted into *The Work*.<sup>278</sup> Fred goes on to give exact details (to the minute) of their train schedule via Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney, and Brisbane, arriving in Cairns at 2.25 p.m. on the 27<sup>th</sup> August and staying until the 6<sup>th</sup> September, after which their itinerary would be ‘*a very elastic one*’. He asks Eastern States friends to ‘*prepare one or two meetings in each State on the way through*’ which would ‘*be sufficient*’ (ibid.) until their return journey. The detailed planning that went into their lecture tours is consistent with the detailed message they believed they had been chosen to deliver:

*We have been entrusted with a ‘Message’ to all the sincere souls in Australasia & it is our duty and great pleasure to do all that lies in our power to carry out the mission entrusted to us ... Revealed Knowledge of GOD’S PLAN is pouring through every available channel around the globe, as never before in the history of this planet & our contention is that every searching soul is entitled to it. That is only one reason why we make no charge for our services or literature ... GOD’S TRUTH IS NOT FOR SALE ... It is freely given to all who SEEK & ASK (Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, June 1966, p. 1 & cont. p. 19).*

### Prophet Marries Follower

The isolation of Perth had enabled Mary initially to turn Fred into a somewhat respectable ‘religious philosopher’, something that could not have happened in Queensland where his name was inextricably linked with nudism and scandal.<sup>279</sup> While this aspect of Fred’s past was never to trouble the Robinsons at *Shalam*, it would

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<sup>278</sup> While I had never made the connection before, my own honeymoon was also a ‘lecture tour’ – however, my wife Louise was not as convinced about my ‘lecturing’ as Mary had been about Fred’s.

<sup>279</sup> In the mid-1970s when the Universal Brotherhood came in for some adverse publicity, the editors of Brisbane’s *The Sunday Sun* were quick to make the connection with Fred Robinson’s past. Their headline read, ‘FRED THE NAKED GURU RISES AGAIN ... Brother Fred Robinson is no stranger to Queensland. Twenty years ago he ran a nudist establishment at Browns Plains near Brisbane. Ten Years ago he was boss of another unclothed jungle group near Cairns ...’ (8.5.1975, p. 1).

however not be long before he was creating a name for himself as a health crank – even a quack. The term ‘religious philosopher’ had also been dropped for ‘prophet’. The following text accompanied a wedding photograph of the Robinsons ‘outside the church’ in which they were married:

### **Prophet (75) Marries Follower**

**The seventy-five year old self-styled “prophet” and “spiritual scientist” Fred Robinson of Armadale, married his 53 year-old co-worker Mrs. Mary Broun today.**

The couple founded the five-acre spiritual retreat, Shalam in Armadale three years ago. The retreat is the home of a group of “new age” spiritual followers – self supporting vegetarians who ban smoking, alcohol, meat and drugs – including coffee.

White bearded Mr Robinson hit the headlines last year after having claimed to have found a cure for cancer in the taking of massive doses of vitamin C. The claim was refuted by medical men.

The former seaman, wharfie, and taxi-driver Robinson and his bride, a former Carlisle housewife, arrived together at the Seekers Centre Church, Subiaco, in a van for today’s wedding. Tonight they will leave by train for a lecture tour-honeymoon in the Eastern States and New Zealand (*The Sunday Times*, 13<sup>th</sup> August 1966, p. 1).

While this article is respectful enough of them, the oddity of this couple and their activities is not disguised. Their age differential; their supposed ‘spiritual followers’; their ‘banning’ of multiple norms; Fred’s earlier life as a ‘seaman, wharfie and taxi driver’; their arrival ‘together’ at the (suspect) ‘Seekers Centre Church’,<sup>280</sup> ‘in a van’, and about to leave on a ‘lecture-tour-honeymoon’, all add up to the Robinsons being cast as a very odd couple – and for good reason. Graham, Mary’s youngest son, and fifteen at the time was quite removed from the action:

As they say on TV these days, “Where were you on 9/11?” I’m afraid it was like that for me with the events of my youth. I did not even know about the wedding until I read about it in the newspaper (*The Sunday Times*, front page) (Graham Broun, email, 10.9.2011).

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<sup>280</sup> The Seekers Centre (see footnote 180) was the Spiritualist New Age Church which had hosted the quixotic Dr de la Ferriere. There is some conflation with this ‘Seekers Centre’ and another group which was called ‘The Centre’ – a group founded by Rev Mario Schoenmaker in the late 1960s. I had first thought the Robinsons were married by Schoenmaker, as I remember them talking about him, his centre, and their similar connections. Schoenmaker has been described as ‘Australia’s Edgar Casey’ (Drury & Tillett 1980, p. 129); his teachings, another exercise in New Age syncretism, were in part derived from Rudolf Steiner’s Anthroposophy, Max Heindel’s Rosicrucianism, and Hermetic esotericism (<http://www.marioschoenmaker.com/Survey/survey3-thelinea.html>, accessed 3.7.2011). Schoenmaker was (with his co-worker Rev. Colin Read) to become the cofounder of the first Australian born church to be recognised by the Australian Government in 1975 (<http://www.marioschoenmaker.com/>, accessed 3.7.2011). The New Age groups of Perth in the mid-to-late 1960s cooperated, while they competed in the spiritual marketplace. The isolation of this *City of Light* created a bond, which helped to make Perth an unlikely centre of New Age activity, reifying Fred’s theory that it was a *destined cosmic power point*.



There is a gap in the Robinsons' archive from June 1966 till December 1967. However, from the first UBI publication entitled *The Universal Brotherhood: The Emergence of a New Civilisation* (1974) in a Chapter entitled 'An Eleven Year Review' (p. 9) Mary, writing in the third person, relates a thumbnail sketch of their history. After three months at Ogamisama's Temple 'observing the similarities between the information coming through the eastern channels, and that of western avenues', she returned home to 'join Fred in a tour of the Australian mainland and the island state of Tasmania' (ibid.). Mary did not mention their marriage. There could only have been a few months between their return from this Australia-wide tour and their next one, which Mary does describe in the 1974 review:

*In 1967, they drove a Kombi Camper to Cairns in the far eastern corner of Australia and lectured in many large town and cities, concentrating on the purpose and source of the flying saucers being sighted around the globe (Mary Robinson, in UBI booklet, 1974, p. 10).*

Writing for a 1974 audience they make no mention of the real purpose of this trip – to inform and warn Australians of the great Illumination and the End of the World.

## **The 'Last Round Up' Tour: and Christmas 1967**

Ever since they had become Australia's hub in the Universal Link the Robinsons had made it their calling to inform the masses of the 'cosmic changes' to come. The basic ideas and rationale of this prophecy were enunciated by Fred:

*... Six years ago The Christ began manifesting and on the 13/11/1961 gave forth this message:–*

*"By the first second of the first hour of the seventh Christmas morn hence, I will have revealed Myself to the Universe through nuclear evolution".*

*We, at 'Shalam', feel called to pass this message on to all who will listen (Fred Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, December 1967, p. 5).*

The Robinsons had faith in God's protection and cosmic illumination. They had never become embroiled in the self-preserving atomic-bomb-shelter movement of the (mainly American) 1950s and '60s. Instead they believed that an atomic bomb would be a

wonderful and illuminating experience for those who were ‘ready’ to appreciate such *nuclear evolution*:

*... The intervention is dependent on man’s pressing of the button, as the following statement implies, also given on the 13/11/1961.*

*“A human press button device will be used and, simultaneously with the pressing of the button, instead of disaster, the Universal Revelation will occur”.*

*WISE VIRGINS however, are filling their lamps with oil – trimming the wicks and polishing the glass (purifying mind, body and soul) in readiness for the consummation of the Mystical Marriage – Great illumination – union with The Christ or Cosmic consciousness.*

*To sit on the fence at this late hour, is sheer lunacy. The ‘Signs’ are plentiful for those who Seek and Ask. The writing is on the wall, so that ‘those who run may read’ (Fred Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, December 1967, pp. 5–6).*

Neither Fred nor Mary had any fear of the cosmic changes they believed were about to occur. Fred disliked the Prophet of Doom tag that dogged him. But by the 1970s when asked ‘Are you a prophet of doom?’ he would say, ‘*Yes. I am a prophet of doom – the doom of everything evil, false and ugly. But, I am also a prophet of hope – the hope of everything good true and beautiful*’ (Fred Robinson, pers. comm., and lectures 1970s). The following text bears out Fred’s faith stance:

***THE WAITING PERIOD:***

*Have no doubts. . All is well. . Fear and doubt block the Light. . God’s Plan is absolute. . No matter what appears to be, ALL is going according to Plan. . These ARE “The Latter Days” in which all shall be fulfilled. . (Fred Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, December 1967, p. 6).*

The Robinsonian double-full-stop magnifies the assurances that the world was definitely, positively and happily about to end. In the meantime readers were to use their time wisely:

*Be grateful for this waiting period that you might continue to Polish Your Soul, so when the “Cosmic Power House” is switched on your “Light bulb” will shine more brightly. . (Fred Robinson, *Shalam Light*, December 1967, p. 6).*

The trope of the *light bulb* was reworked effectively for my generation. Fred assured us: ‘*The cosmic power house will illuminate your own individual light bulb to your full capacity to receive it – so increase your capacity!*’ Already in-tune with cosmic vibrations, and having experienced *the light* through eastern meditation and/or

drug experiences, the trope really hit a countercultural nerve-ending. It gave us the nerve to start something really positive. This followed the concept of permanent positivity – also the order of the day in 1967, when it was called ‘risen thinking’:

*Liebie’s “Risen Thinking”<sup>281</sup> (without a gap) should be our goal just now. . To raise our thinking to the highest level. To Love and Live with positive anticipation without a “Gap” of doubt. . If you find yourself in gloom or doubt, the following decree will lift you up, then change to a more positive decree. “Nothing can keep me from the light and love of GOD” (Fred Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, December 1967, p. 6).*

This is one of the few instances I can recall where Fred recommends a decree – they were not really Fred’s thing. During the UBI days this aspect of the teaching was left exclusively to Mary. While Fred may have said affirmations to himself he rarely led the group in such rituals.

### **The Tour Begins**

With ideas in their heads, love in their hearts and a bunch of pamphlets in their Kombi, the Robinsons were ready for the ‘*Last Round Up*’ (ibid., p.3). Leaving a skeleton staff of alignees at Shalam to answer enquiries, they left Perth soon after an advertisement in The Perth’s *Weekend News* on the 21<sup>st</sup> July 1967:

***FLYING SAUCERS***  
**KEY TO MAN’S DESTINY**  
COSMIC ILLUMINATION  
BY XMAS  
SPACE BROTHERS REVEAL  
HIDDEN SECRETS. SHALAM 972 476

Picking up their Kombi off the train to Adelaide, they drove straight to Sydney and up the coast to Cairns, giving private talks in the lounge rooms of friends and readers of *Shalam Light* where they lodged. In Cairns they would be hosted by Jimmy and Ida Beck and Tine Harm.<sup>282</sup> Cairns and the Atherton Tablelands had been an outpost for loosely-linked groups of like-minded *Robinsonian* thinkers since the 1950s when Fred

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<sup>281</sup> ‘Risen Thinking’ was a term used by Liebie Pugh, the spiritualist and *sensitive* whom Mary had visited at St Annes (see Chapter 8). It was Pugh who had modelled the clay relief of the being she called Limitless Love and Truth – the supposed source of the prophecies (through Richard Graves) which had kick-started the ‘Universal Link’.

<sup>282</sup> These people were students of Fred’s during the 1950s and early 1960s when he was living in Northern Queensland trying to start a New Age Community.

had lived and taught there; and it had been less than a year since Fred and Mary were there on their honeymoon lecture tour to interested New Agers. In talking with their friends, and receiving ‘guidance’, they hatched a plan to give public lectures on their return journey – which they began around the first week of August 1967.

## **The Public Record of the Robinsons’ Tour**

While the Robinsons’ own detailed record of this 1967 trip has not been found, if it existed at all,<sup>283</sup> some of the advertisements for these public talks and the news clippings about their lecture tour have. These reveal many of the places they went, what they said, and how the media portrayed them. Unprepared Australians were to be made aware of the Universal Link’s revelations about the imminent cosmic changes – like it or not.

### **Townsville**

The first hard evidence of these lectures is a boxed advertisement for a public talk in the township of Hermit Park, on the outskirts of Townsville. The Robinsons were probably staying with friends in Gulliver (between Townsville and Thuringowa), as the address for enquiries was given as 32 Sheffield Street, Gulliver. The heading for this *Townsville Bulletin*’s advertisement read ‘*FLYING SAUCERS*’ – the title they almost always used. The sub-heading of this ‘Public Lecture’ read ‘*ORIGIN, NATURE AND PURPOSES OF IMPENDING WORLD CHANGES*’. The Athletic Club Hall was the venue and Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> August was the date.

### **Bundaberg and Space-people**

The first article I have been able to find relating to this tour appeared in *The Bundaberg NewsMail* on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August 1967. Following much the same pattern as their last trip, the Robinsons began making their way back down the coast to speak along the way – only this time their lectures were public. They relied on their network to organise their talks where they could. More confident and forthright than they had ever been and full of conviction, they must have confounded the country journalists they contacted, who

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<sup>283</sup> Some reflective references to this tour are mentioned in the Christmas 1967 *Shalam Light*; then thought by the Robinsons to be their last edition – on this plane of existence.

were however grateful for the fascinating copy they provided. On the whole, these articles reveal that the press enjoyed the Robinsons, and in many ways gave them a very fair hearing. Perhaps they still seemed a delightful couple, despite – or perhaps because of – their embrace of one of the most unlikely messages in the world, if not *the Omniverse* (a term Fred used to make the distinction between the Local Universe of the Milky Way, and the ever expanding Super Universes beyond – *All of them teaming with Life*):

### **‘Men from Space...’**

**The spacemen are here – according to a Western Australian man and his wife who are on a tour from Cairns to Perth, lecturing on Unidentified Flying Objects.**

**“There are space people on Earth and we claim to know why they are here, and what the U.F.O.’s are all about,” Mr. Fred Robinson said in Bundaberg yesterday.**

Mr. and Mrs. Robinson plan to reveal some of the space secrets at a public meeting tonight in the P.D.C. Hall...

Mr. Robinson said he had been interested in space activity for the last 30 years, and for 15 years has made a detailed examination of U.F.O sightings.

During this time he has been lecturing privately on the subject.

### **“EVIDENCE”**

“We generally get about 50 or 60 people at a public Lecture,” Mrs. Robinson said. “We find about a dozen are really keen, and these people come back for a private discussion.”

**Mr. Robinson believes there is enough evidence to convince anyone that people from space are on earth. “The thing to know is why they are here,” he said.**

“We claim that every man and woman capable of thinking is entitled to know the truth of these matters. Our series of lectures is a private contribution towards trying to enlighten humanity.

“We claim to know and it is up to us to spread the information,” he said (*The Bundaberg NewsMail*, 22.8.1967).

Fred’s line, ‘The thing to know is why they are here’, may not have had a big impact on his Bundaberg audience of 1967, but only four years later it was a major recruiting cosmic hook for budding ‘space cadets’. This line also distinguished Fred Robinson from most spiritual teachers of my generation. Looking at Fred’s slides, flipping through his Flying Saucer books, and hearing his multiple stories of his own research, the evidence *that they were here* seemed altogether convincing. However, the evidence related to *why they were here* was less persuasive. Perhaps it was the ‘open-mindedness’ of spaced-out New Agers that was responsible for persuading so many young people to engage with the Robinsons’ thesis about ‘*the cosmic changes on our doorstep*’. No-one wanted to be seen as narrow-minded or limited – or to be missing

out on understandings that might confer what Fred often called ‘*cosmic consciousness*’ – only occasionally did Fred mention that the term was coined by Maurice Bucke.<sup>284</sup>

The advertisements the Robinsons placed in the local papers when they arrived in a town or city almost always ensured that they would have an article about them published. Other than the heading, each advertisement was different, as though they were conducting a marketing experiment to see what worked best in their efforts to publicise a *cosmic illumination*. In Bundaberg their boxed advertisement looked and read this way:

**FLYING SAUCERS**  
ORIGIN, NATURE AND PURPOSE  
FROM AN ASTRONOMICAL  
AND SCIENTIFIC POINT OF VIEW  
**PUBLIC LECTURE**  
SLIDES and Prof. MacDonald’s report U.N.  
**TONIGHT (TUESDAY) AT 8**  
P.D.C. HALL, Quay Street (next to Butter Factory)  
FRED AND MARY ROBINSON OF W.A.  
Inquiries: 41 Payne St, Bundaberg  
(*The Bundaberg NewsMail*, 22.8.1967, p. 13)

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<sup>284</sup> Richard Maurice Bucke (1837-1902), often called Maurice Bucke, was the Canadian progressive psychiatrist whose best known work, *Cosmic Consciousness* (1901) has become a classic in the modern study of mystical experience. Bucke’s few moments of ‘cosmic consciousness’ came during an 1872 experience of inner light. This direct perception was seen by Bucke as vivifying Goethe’s theory of nature ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard\\_Maurice\\_Bucke](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Maurice_Bucke), accessed 31.3.2011). Writing in the third person, Bucke recalls his experience:

Into his brain streamed one momentary lightning flash ... leaving thenceforward for always an after taste of heaven. Among other things he did not come to believe, he saw and he knew that the Cosmos is not dead matter but a living Presence, That the soul of man is immortal, that the universe is so built and ordered that without any peradventure [uncertainty] all things work together for the good of each and all, that the foundation principle of the world is what we call love, and that the happiness of everyone is in the long run absolutely certain (Bucke from the 1905 edition, p. 8; online see [http://djm.cc/library/Cosmic\\_Consciousness\\_edited02.pdf](http://djm.cc/library/Cosmic_Consciousness_edited02.pdf), accessed 31.3.2011).

‘Cosmic consciousness’ is now used to convey the concept that ‘the universe exists as an interconnected network of consciousness, with each conscious being linked to every other. Sometimes this is conceived as forming a collective consciousness which spans the cosmos (Semple 2008, p. 14); other times it is conceived of as an Absolute or Godhead from which all conscious beings emanate. Throughout history, there have been many renditions of universal unity, connectivity, and the spectrum of considered possibility of mankind ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmic\\_consciousness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmic_consciousness), viewed 1.3.2011).

The Robinsons must have had friends in Payne St. Bundaberg, for if they didn't they would have given their address as care of the local caravan park, as they did in a number of the country towns they visited. Mary told me they had some dramatic discussions with other travellers of the time. I can picture the Robinsons next to their green Kombi, firing up a potato-barbeque campfire, with Fred's cosmic charts on a flap of their annex tent. I can visualise Fred, in the pin-drop silence he could produce, raising his pointer stick to the sky and saying: '*It's the height of arrogance to think we are the only intelligent beings in this vast universe!*' No opportunity was ever missed.

### **Toowoomba and Unvarnished Facts**

A week later *The Toowoomba Chronicle* ran a fourteen line advertisement; the longest I have seen. The words 'unvarnished' and 'uncensored' related to the

**FLYING SAUCERS!!**  
EARTH'S BIGGEST (?) FOR THE LAST  
20 YEARS  
**If you want the FACTS – Unvarnished – Uncensored**  
**Who they are? Where they are from?**  
**What their purpose is? Will they land –**  
**and when?**  
**HEAR MR. and MRS. ROBINSON**  
Speaking on  
**“UFOs In Relation to the Coming World Changes”**  
At the Trades Hall Supper Room  
Tomorrow Night, Tuesday, August 19,  
At 7.30 p.m.  
No Admission Charge  
(*The Toowoomba Chronicle*, 18.8.1967)

The story about the Robinsons in the same edition offers more insight into their unusual lecture tour. This 400 word article, which included more about Mary's part in the partnership, was not included in the Bundaberg report. The headline of this article was surely arresting for a country newspaper in the 1960s:

## “SPACEMEN AWARE OF EARTH EVENTS”

**A man who believes spacemen are fully aware of what is happening on Earth and that they are here to help people adjust to changing conditions, is in Toowoomba to deliver a lecture on unidentified flying objects...**

... Mrs. Robinson has travelled the throughout the world interviewing people who have studied the question and existence of UFOs and who have seen them. They claim to have indirectly communicated with people from spacecrafts.

Mr. Robinson first became interested in UFOs in 1936 and believes a study should have been made of the objects immediately after the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan. This was when UFOs began to appear in numbers, Mr. Robinson said. The Robinsons are New Age Missionaries, and conduct a spiritual information centre in Perth.

### MONTHLY MAGAZINE

**When in Western Australia they print a monthly magazine on UFOs which is circulated throughout the world.**

Apart their studies on spacecraft, Mr. and Mrs. Robinson have a five acre “organic garden” in Armadale a suburb of Perth, “to get back to nature.”

“We believe that each man is attempting to make his own conception of the Garden of Eden,” Mr. Robinson said...

*(The Toowoomba Chronicle, 18.8.1967)*

The last paragraphs, relating to self-sufficiency and getting back to nature, were beginning to have enough cultural currency on their own to make them newsworthy. A few years later Fred’s focus to my generation had shifted. The merging of *Aquarian Communities* with *Organic Gardens of Eden* had become more important than the sensationalised and high-tech UFOs. Even though Space People were still part of the Robinsonian package, it was the back-to-nature theme that was in the ascendancy, and the major drawcard. Although there has been no mention of him in any of the press articles I have found, or in extant *Shalam Lights*, Ralf Nader was often mentioned in the Robinsons’ lectures from the time his book *Unsafe at Any Speed* was published in 1966. Along with Bob Hawke, Nader was one of Mary’s *pin up boys* (as she openly called them) – those people who exposed *the bad* in society and fought for *the good*. Later in his career, when Nader came on tour to Perth, Mary insisted that a group of UBI members go to hear this American consumer activist – and to meet him.

### Lithgow, Bathurst and UFOs

The next extant news-clipping entitled ‘Couple to Lecture on UFOs’ (*The Lithgow Mercury*, 13.9.1967, p. 3), covered much the same ground as the Bundaberg and



Toowoomba articles, but it also revealed more about when the tour began and how the public lectures developed:

Mr. And Mrs. Robinson left Perth at the beginning of July with the aim of travelling to Cairns on a private lecture tour. On

reaching Cairns they decided to conduct public lectures because of the widespread interest on UFOs (*The Lithgow Mercury*, 13.9.1967, p. 3).

These public Lectures were clearly a preliminary ‘*sifting of the wheat from the chaff*’ (always a favoured metaphor of the Robinsons). This savvy cosmic couple made sure that people knew how to contact them – and that seekers could go further with their interest if they wished:

They said that any “really interested” persons could contact them at the Lithgow Camping Reserve in regard to a private

lecture to be held on Friday Night (*The Lithgow Mercury*, 13.9.1967, p. 3).

The Robinsons were happy to find the relatively few people who were ‘*ready*’; and this could occasionally include a journalist. During the following week the editor of Bathurst’s *The Western Advocate* was clearly on the Robinsons’ side, supporting their lecture with a measured editorial that raised the subject objectively without cynicism or ridicule:

### **Editorial**

#### **REAL OR IMAGINARY?**

Are “Flying Saucers” real or a mental fabrication?

This is a question which is raised a thousand times more frequently today than any time in the past.

So called unidentified flying objects have been sighted around the world – in the air over the sea and on land.

Many scientists – and they are the people equipped to carry out research and investigations – are sceptical about the whole thing; but there are some who lean to the theory that they are a reality.

It is certain that life exists elsewhere in the immense universe – probably on millions of planets.

It is, therefore, not inconceivable that creatures elsewhere could have invented the means of visiting the planet Earth.

However, at present there is no more than confusion over the matter – a few believing but the majority disbelieving.

Bathurst people might know a little more about the subject after Sunday night, when a public lecture is to be given by an enthusiast over the question of “Flying Saucers” (see story, page 3) (*The Western Advocate*, 16.9.1967, p. 2).

The sympathetic story, “‘Flying Saucer’ Investigator to Lecture Here’, written by *The Western Advocate*’s journalist faithfully records the claims and positions put by this dedicated and sincere couple, leaving it up to readers to make up their own minds:

A 76 year-old man who has made an intensive study of unidentified flying objects for the past 30 years will give a lecture on the subject in Bathurst tomorrow night.

He is Mr. Fred Robinson, of Perth, who, with his wife, has travelled across

Australia, talking on UFOs. Mr. Robinson said yesterday that they were fully convinced that there were beings from space “fully aware of what is happening on earth”

*(The Western Advocate, 16.9.1967, p. 3).*

The Robinsons are quoted making much the same basic claims and information as in the previous articles: knowing why the UFOs are here; asserting that everyone is entitled to know the truth about them; that they have opened the lectures to the public; and that there are always people interested. However the following paragraph, almost an advertorial, describes the audio visual content of the evening at the Red Cross Hall the following night, adding that there would be no charge made: ‘It will include the showing of a number of slides which the Robinsons say are of great interest in supporting their beliefs on the UFO question. There will be no charge for admission’ (ibid.). These slides were indeed convincing to any audience – especially with Fred’s authoritative running commentary and his pointer stick, which he wielded with school-teacher like expertise.

The Robinson's advertisement on the following day was much more personal and engaging than the Bundaberg and Lithgow advertisements. Perhaps the more positive take by the editor/journalist (likely to have been the same person) encouraged Fred and Mary to make a more personal appeal in their advertising:

**FLYING SAUCERS**  
**THE KEY TO MAN’S DESTINY!**  
YOUR PLACE IN THIS SCHEME – HEAR MR.  
AND MRS. FRED ROBINSON SPEAKING ON  
“UFOs IN RELATION TO COMING  
WORLD CHANGES”  
AT THE RED CROSS HALL, 109 BENTICK ST,  
**SUNDAY, September 17, at 7.30pm**  
NO ADMISSION CHARGE  
*(The Western Advocate, 17.9.1967)*

## **Dubbo, Parkes and the Cosmic Operation**

A week later the Robinsons were in Dubbo, and were now more specific about the coming changes: ‘These people from other planets are supervising the cosmic operation which will change the atomic structure of Earth before Christmas this year, Mr. and Mrs. Robinson claim’ (*The Daily Liberal*, 25.9.1967). The headline ‘Space People Probing the Earth’ was a creative way of introducing the subject. The article broached lifestyle issues as well as UFOs, describing the Robinsons’ home in some depth, calling it ‘a Spiritual life centre’ and explaining that ‘their five-acre plot is called “Shalam”, a place of peace and harmony’ (*The Daily Liberal*, 25.9.1967).

Three days later the Robinsons were in Parkes where they must have made a strong impression on the journalist they spoke with, for the 1,100 word article was the longest, most scientifically inflected article I have ever seen about the Robinsons’ *space people* claims. Perhaps their special interest in the Parkes Observatory, which I know they visited on this trip, had something to do with the scientific slant of this article. Fred always loved to have engineers, scientists and astronomers (if he could get them) come to his meetings, where he could go head-to-head with the experts, and explain to them his simple but controversial truths. Certainly the advertisement was designed to encourage scientific types. Interestingly there is no personal appeal to the masses here, nor any of the sensationalism evident in some of their other advertisements.

### ***FLYING SAUCERS***

Origin nature and purpose – Slides and astronomical  
Charts. Quasi stellar source revealed. McNamara’s  
“Horizon of Horror” reversed

**HEAR FRED AND MARY ROBINSON OF W.A.**

C.W.A. Hall, Currajong Street,

**Thursday, 28<sup>th</sup> September at 8.00pm**

Enquiries Phone 621076

(*The Champion Post*, 27.9.1967, p. 4).

Here the Robinsons were referring to the “Mutual Deterrence” Speech, by the United States Secretary of Defence, Robert McNamara, delivered only a week earlier in San Francisco. The introduction to McNamara’s speech contextualises the nuclear issues which the Robinsons were discussing; makes sense of the idea of the reversal of McNamara’s *horizon of horror*; and shows just how abreast of current news the Robinsons were:

In a complex and uncertain world, the gravest problem that an American Secretary of Defense must face is that of planning, preparation and policy against the possibility of thermonuclear war. It is a prospect that most of mankind understandably would prefer not to contemplate. For technology has now circumscribed us all with a horizon of horror that could dwarf any catastrophe that has befallen man in his more than a million years on earth (McNamara 18.9.1967, <http://www.atomicarchive.com/Docs/Deterrence/Deterrence.shtml>, accessed 3.3.2010).

The long article in *The Champion Post* on the same day covered all the ground of other articles, but following the more scientific thrust of the advertisement. Of particular interest is the mention made of the Robinsons' research on UFO sightings, something they thought of minor import – simply proving what they already knew. Nowhere in the article is the popular but unscientific term 'Flying Saucers' used:

### **“Cosmic Re-Adjustment” Lecturer in Parkes**

... Mr. and Mrs. Robinson, who operate a special space research and information centre at Armadale in Western Australia – twenty miles south of Perth – are currently midway through a 10,000 mile tour of Australia...

... During the tour they have carried out intensive research on reported Unidentified Flying Object sightings and lectured at most towns along the way on the history and facts surrounding the sightings and happenings...

“...already scientists have had some difficulty in following the strange trends in the weather patterns of the world,” he added.

Mr. Robinson has been involved in space research work since 1936 and, from his headquarters in West Australia; he can operate a network of communication around the globe.

**He told the *Champion Post* that he has been in contact with the space people – indirectly – by means of mental telepathy, short-wave radio and, in one case, television...**

*(The Champion Post, 27.9.1967, p. 4).*

The 'space research' Fred mentions 'since 1936' – more than a decade before the modern spate of sightings – referred to his time observing Ione, who Fred believed to be *from another planet come to help uplift humanity*. This kind of research was probably not what the newspaper journalist had in mind. Regarding the indirect contact with space people via 'short-wave radio, and, in one case, television' it is difficult to trace the actual events Fred is referring to. The 'research' of Gabriel Green, of *The U.F.O. International*; the UFO presidential candidate is a possibility. Fred was an exaggerator, but not a fabricator. Mary was not given to hyperbole at all, and would interrupt and correct Fred – and he learnt to back-track with grace. In this article Mary is given more space than was usual:

... Mrs. Robinson supports her husband's theories and beliefs.

"Our brothers in space are of far greater involvement than men of Earth and they are able to foresee events in advance," she said. "They are here to supervise and assist the planet Earth undergo cosmic re-adjustment.

They have conveyed this information to all the Governments of the world but a sinister conspiracy of silence has kept it from reaching the people"

(*The Champion Post*, 27.9.1967, p. 4).

Rarely did newspapers print Fred's quotes from 'reliable witnesses', or statements from authorities on the subject he was speaking about. Even though Fred was always quoting other people, he was seen to be speaking for himself and Mary alone. It is important to keep in mind that Fred saw himself as a researcher, collator and dispenser of *vital information* – yet he was never a channel as such, and he never claimed to be.

The following section in *The Champion Post* article reveals something of Fred's genuine research practice. Using Shalam as a vehicle for the republishing of research texts in a condensed form, the Robinsons had been actively reading and often communicating with the authors and researchers on a plethora of subjects. Often these letters were thank you notes to those who were breaking new ground in their field of research – people such as Dr. James E. McDonald.<sup>285</sup>

### ***The Champion Post* and Professor James McDonald**

Clearly having been given a raft of the scientific literature by the Robinsons, the journalist who wrote the *Champion Post* article represented both the Robinsons and UFOs. For such an article to be written in an Australian country newspaper is remarkable. However, it fitted with the strategy which the Robinsons had chosen. They believed that the older generation of city people had become so clever, sophisticated, and fast-paced that they could no longer discern 'the truth'. The Robinsons told me that their time speaking in rural areas, and specifically to country journalists, was so much

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<sup>285</sup> James E. McDonald (1920–1971) was best known for his research regarding UFOs. McDonald was senior physicist at the Institute for Atmospheric Physics and professor in the Department of Meteorology, University of Arizona, Tucson. McDonald campaigned vigorously in support of expanding UFO studies during the mid-to-late 1960s, arguing that UFOs represented an intriguing, pressing and unsolved mystery which had not been adequately studied by science. He was one of the more prominent figures of his time who argued in favour of the extraterrestrial hypothesis as a plausible, but not completely proven, model of UFO phenomena ... A dedicated and tireless UFO researcher and scholar, McDonald interviewed over 500 UFO witnesses, uncovered many important government UFO documents, and gave important presentations of UFO evidence. He testified before Congress during the UFO hearings of 1968. McDonald also gave a famous talk called 'Science in Default' to the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). It was a summary of the current UFO evidence and a critique of the Condon Report UFO study ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James\\_E.\\_McDonald](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_E._McDonald), accessed 3.3.2007).

more rewarding than their city counterparts. Country people were seen as more open, prepared to listen, and less likely to ridicule their message (pers. comm., 1971). The extant articles from this tour are congruent with these reflections – none more so than this *Champion Post* article, in which the journalist himself displays a sense of *the seekers' mission*: to find out if what Fred had told him had any basis in reality:

Mr. Robinson stated that the many UFO sightings around the World posed one of the greatest scientific problems of the age.

He pointed out that the problem had also been recognised by the United Nations Organisation and that one of the leading world authorities, Dr. James E. McDonald – senior physicist in the Institute of Atmospheric Physics, and professor in the Department of Meteorology at the University of Arizona, Tucson, in the United States of America – was recently appointed to investigate the entire problem.

... “UFO sightings were once regarded as purely imaginary around the world but now, many people are thinking about the

numerous reports that regularly come to hand, with open minds.”

In Russia, where reports about unidentified flying objects were once all but dismissed as an invention of the sensation-seeking Western press, sightings are now being treated with more respect. This new attitude is reflected in a book published under the editorship of Professor Boris P. Konstantiviv, vice president of the Russian Academy of Sciences ...

He admits that the idea of “flying saucers” is fantastic and perhaps beyond the realm of common sense but adds that “common sense is not a very reliable guide when we come across a completely new situation” (*The Champion Post*, 27.9.1967, p. 4).

The journalist spends another three paragraphs commenting on Konstantiviv's paper, which Fred must have given him, before concluding with the comment that ‘the possibility that they come from outer space should not be excluded’(ibid.).

This (unusually) investigative journalist who interviewed the Robinsons went further, extensively quoting Dr. McDonald and following his logic – clearly giving the subject some credence. That such long quotations and analysis of McDonald's address should appear in the local press of a NSW country town is all the more remarkable since the scientist's paper had been given only four months earlier. The section also makes it clear how McDonald, a main-stream scientist, viewed this issue – and gives credibility to the Robinsons' assumption that UFOs/Flying Saucers should be viewed seriously by scientists:

The UFO problem has become so great in the U.S.A. that Professor McDonald gave an address to the annual meeting of the American Society of Newspaper editors, at Washington D.C. in April, this year. Following is a summary of this address.

“An intensive analysis of hundreds of UFO Reports, and personal interviews with dozens of witnesses in important cases, has led me to the conclusion that the UFO problem is one of exceedingly great scientific importance.

“Instead of deserving the description of a nonsense problem, which it has had during 20 years of official mishandling, it warrants the attention of science, press and public, not just within the United States but throughout the world as a serious scientific problem of the first order.”

“The curious manner in which this problem has been kept out of sight and maintained in disrepute is examined in the address. Basic responsibility for its systematic misrepresentation lies with the United States Air Force’s project “Bluebook” which on the basis of first-hand knowledge, I can only describe as having been carried

out in the past dozen years in a quite superficial and incompetent manner.

“Years of Air Force assurances have kept the public, the press, Congress and the scientific community under the misimpression that the UFO problem was being studied with thoroughness and scientific expertise.

“This I have found to be completely false, illustrative examples – drawn from a very large sample – are described in the address to demonstrate this.

“It is urged that the time is long overdue for a full-scale Congressional investigation of the UFO problem, an investigation in which persons outside of official channels can put on record the astounding history of the way in which a problem of potentially enormous scientific importance has been swept under a rug of ridicule and misrepresentation for two decades.

“The hypothesis that the UFOs might be extraterrestrial probes, despite its seemingly low probability, is suggested as the least unsatisfactory hypothesis for explaining the now available UFO evidence”  
(*The Champion Post*, 27.9.1967, p. 4).

Fred and Mary Robinson were amongst a small number of Australians who supported McDonald’s position. While remembering Fred reading quotes of McDonald, I also remember him telling me he had been in contact with a well known American scientist. Although Fred and Mary are likely to have corresponded with McDonald, it seems unlikely they met him; although he did come to Australia the month before the Robinsons left on their ‘Last Roundup’ lecture tour.<sup>286</sup> The bulk of the Australian UFO community was unimpressed with Fred’s *propheteering*, and his claim that the *Space People* were the source of the prophecy he and Mary were publicising. Even if the Robinsons had wanted to meet McDonald, they would have been kept away by those

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<sup>286</sup> In late 1967, McDonald secured a modest grant from the Office of Naval Research in order to study cloud formations in Australia. While in Australia, McDonald conducted some UFO research in his own time ([http://wapedia.mobi/en/James\\_E.\\_McDonald](http://wapedia.mobi/en/James_E._McDonald), accessed 4.3.2010).

who organised his tour.<sup>287</sup> The fact that McDonald had just been in Australia suited Fred and Mary – for the subject of UFOs had been getting publicity. From Fred’s point of view McDonald was laying the groundwork – helping people to accept the fact they were here – now all they needed to understand was: Why they were here? What they were going to do? and When they were coming? – and the Robinsons believed they had answers to all of these questions – particularly the last one – Christmas 1967!

While Fred Robinson may not have been a key figure within the dedicated UFO and Flying saucer Clubs of the mid-to-late 1960s, he was arguably the most publicly heard UFO advocate in Australian – as these articles in country towns attest. Colin Norris, someone who was well known for courting publicity on UFOs, while ambivalent about Fred’s UFO contributions admitted that Fred seemed to have a knack of engaging the press and electronic media in a way that other UFO researchers could not (Colin Norris, pers. comm., 2008).<sup>288</sup>

Fred did have an advantage over most specialist Ufologists, in that he and Mary were not specialists. Shalam, as a ‘New Age Information Centre’ dealt with a host of subjects that were newsworthy. Later when the UBI was functioning, Fred would almost always use any occasion, initially designed to talk about organic gardening or the UBI Community, to publicise the importance of the ‘Elder Brothers’ and the vehicles they used – UFOs such as flying saucers and cigar shaped mother-ships – and then would

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<sup>287</sup> Initially I thought the Robinsons may have met McDonald during his trip to Australia. I asked the Australian UFO historian Bill Chalker about the likelihood:

With regard to the possibility of a McDonald/Robinson meeting it seems unlikely, certainly in a formal sense. McDonald was in Australia between the 24<sup>th</sup> of June and the 10<sup>th</sup> of July ... so there was no cross over ... While in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Hobart the local groups were keeping McDonald as close to them as possible, and I’m sure would not have encouraged any “flying saucer” “outsider” as Fred would have been cast, to take up his time (Bill Chalker, email, 20.6. 2011).

<sup>288</sup> Colin Norris (1920–2009) was long considered by the local media of South Australia as “Mr. UFO”... He started studying the subject in more detail as reports of ‘flying saucers’ gained more prominence in Australia during 1952. By 1957 he had joined Fred Stone’s Australia Flying Saucer Research Society (see Chapter 5 Part 6 ‘Fred Stone and ASIO’). Following Fred Stone’s departure from AFSRS in 1962 Colin became vice president. In 1963 he was quoted by *The Adelaide News* (27<sup>th</sup> April) saying, ‘I just think the world might have something to gain from these people, who might be more advanced in knowledge than we are.’ By the end of the 1960s he had the highest profile of any UFO researcher in South Australia. He lectured at the 1965 Ballarat UFO conference on ‘History of UFOs’ and was a speaker at the 1971 Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science (ANZAAS) symposium on UFOs, one of the few times mainstream science publically engaged with “the UFO problem” (Bill Chalker, <http://theozfiles.blogspot.com/2009/07/passing-of-south-australias-mr-ufo.html>, accessed 4.7.2011).



launch into the part they were to play in the purification of the planet. Even though it damaged the credibility of the group, no one could stop him. In the same way the UFO community in Australia was also disadvantaged by Fred Robinson's angle on flying saucers and the part they were to play in prophecy. However, as we have seen, neither Fred Stone nor ASIO could stop him.

While Fred and Mary spoke to many people who claimed to have sighted UFOs, and met and read the works of *contactees* who claimed to have had close encounters of the third kind (personal contact experiences), their focus was always on *the next step*. I remember Fred telling me he had met Erich von Däniken, when he came to Australia to publicise *Chariots of the Gods*.<sup>289</sup> Fred purportedly told von Däniken: 'We start where you leave off' (pers.com. 1971). Fred would have said much the same had he met McDonald. Immersed in the spiritual implications, and to them, practical ramifications of the 'truth/fact' that extraterrestrials were here, and had a plan to re-adjust the planet before Christmas 1967 – the Robinsons were unwilling to '*water down the simple truth*'. Nonetheless the Robinsons had good things to say about McDonald, and he must have been happy to have received support – especially as he was being marginalised back home. The story of McDonald's last years is heart wrenching. Ann Druffel, McDonald's Biographer sees him as a forgotten hero.<sup>290</sup> Certainly McDonald was well credentialed:

His voluminous contributions to Cloud Physics and Climate Modification were widely acclaimed, and his reputation was renowned worldwide. He was active on many government research commissions, and many of his projects were funded by grants from the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Office of Naval Research (ONR), The National Academy of Sciences (NAS), NASA and other top agencies.

McDonald was unique. He had quietly studied UFO sightings in and around the Tucson area for eight full years before he decided to go public with his interest. He was fully aware that "going public" might bring controversy and scorn upon his head from scientific colleagues who had never studied the UFO phenomenon and who accepted

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<sup>289</sup> Erich Anton Paul von Däniken (1935 –) is a Swiss author best known for his controversial claims about extraterrestrial influences on early human culture, in books such as *Chariots of the Gods*, published in 1968. Däniken is one of the main figures responsible for popularising the 'paleo-contact' and ancient astronaut hypotheses ... His ideas are largely rejected by scientists and academics, who categorise his work as pseudo-history and pseudo-archaeology ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erich\\_von\\_D%C3%A4niken#Popularity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erich_von_D%C3%A4niken#Popularity), accessed 4.7.2011).

<sup>290</sup> Anne Druffel in her 2003 authorised biography, *Firestorm: Dr James E. McDonald's Fight for UFO Science* considers McDonald a 'largely forgotten hero in the long and important battle to uncover the truth of alien presence on Earth' (back cover).

the government's "explanation" of the problem as the final word. He forged ahead, adding UFO research to his already crowded research/teaching schedule. At first he managed to use partial ONR funding for his UFO research, but political manoeuvring soon cut this off. He continued untroubled, speaking sometimes as often as two to three times a week before scientific conferences, symposia and colloquia, giving hundreds of such talks between 1966–1971. He travelled incessantly around the U.S. and into foreign countries on this quest (<http://www.anndruffel.com/articles/ufo/jamesmcdonaldsufofiles.htm>, accessed 22.4.2010).

McDonald, through his outspoken criticism of *Project Bluebook* and the later *Condon Committee* (1968) was becoming professionally isolated. He did not suffer fools graciously and became impatient with those whom he judged unscientific. In his 1969 paper, 'Science in Default', he accused the University of Colorado's Condon Committee of faulty methodology and employing 'scientific padding'. His outspokenness against the use of Napalm in the Vietnam War caused him to be investigated by the FBI, as did his association with peace activists and 'hippies':

A bulletin put out by the Tucson Peace Center (TPC) and received through the mail, February 7, 1968, advertised the fact that on February 8 1968, there would be a public meeting where Dr. James E. Mc Donald would speak on the subject of napalm (From confidential files released by the FBI, <http://www.cufon.org/cufon/fbimcdon.htm>, accessed 5.3.2010).

Perhaps the hardest knock McDonald took was in relation to his appearance before a Congress Committee, where along with other atmospheric physicists, he provided evidence against the development of the Supersonic Transport (SST) Plane, convinced it could potentially harm the Earth's vital but fragile Ozone layer. During this hearing a Congressman (whose district contained factories that would help build the SST) tried to discredit McDonald by switching the focus to McDonald's UFO research, stating that anyone who "believes in little green men" was not a credible witness. The open laughter of some committee members must have been deeply humiliating.

In March 1971, McDonald's wife told him she wanted a divorce. After finishing a few articles (UFO-related and otherwise) he made plans for the storage of his notes, papers and research. In April he attempted suicide by shooting himself in the head. He was blinded and wheelchair bound and was briefly committed to the psychiatric ward at Tucson Hospital. Recovering some peripheral vision, he made plans to return to his teaching position. However, on the 13<sup>th</sup> June 1971 he was by found dead by a creek

with a .38 calibre revolver next to him – and a suicide note. Four of McDonald’s peers from the University of Arizona wrote a reminiscence of their colleague, calling him “a man of great integrity and great courage.” He was loved and admired by a great many people, while making a lasting impact on many facets of atmospheric sciences ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James\\_E.\\_McDonald](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_E._McDonald), accessed 4.3.2010).

Fred Robinson must have heard of McDonald’s tragic death and he would have related it to Ione’s plight. He had, over a lifetime of failures, inured himself against disappointment and ridicule, living the axiom that ‘success is going from failure to failure without a loss of enthusiasm’ (*Quotations Book* 2007). Only weeks after McDonald’s death Fred departed on his journey to find out for himself what young people were doing on their widely publicised ‘hippie communes’, and to see if he could encourage this new generation to follow the *Universal Principles* or *Cosmic Laws* which he and Mary had understood and had put into practice. At eighty Fred was running out of generations to influence.

### **Wagga Wagga, Adelaide and ‘a Breakthrough’**

Only one short and undated article exists between the 29<sup>th</sup> of September and the 28<sup>th</sup> of October. This was an article entitled ‘Discussions on Flying Objects’, in Wagga Wagga’s *Daily Advertiser*. The only deviation from the other articles was that they conflated Fred’s and Mary’s experiences: ‘Mr. Robinson has travelled the world and interviewed numerous people about Unidentified Flying Objects’ (*circa* October, 1967). The gap in the archive suggests they spent most of October in Sydney before driving through Wagga Wagga where they no doubt gave a lecture before heading on to Adelaide, where Fred had a number of dedicated students, and was able to get publicity for his activities through his network of 1950s and early ’60s ‘students’ and Shalam correspondents who would host them.

It appears that the Robinsons spent a considerable time in Adelaide on this occasion, where they stayed with Fred and Edith Knobloch at their Seacombe Gardens home. An advertisement for a talk on Flying Saucers ‘on Sunday evening the 28<sup>th</sup> of October at the Leavitt Hall in Wakefield Street’ (*The News*, 28.10.1967, p. 4) makes it clear that the Robinsons were in town. An article by Jim Robbins, part of his regular column,

described the Robinsons and commented on their message, revealing that Fred was getting pretty excited about the coming *Christmas Illumination*. Although Adelaide was not a big city in 1967, the journalist writes in a more sophisticated style than his country counterparts, structuring the article via quotes designed to make light of the Robinsons' message – and out of their own mouth:

## **Saucers**

Gentle, bearded 76-year-old Fred Robinson, of Perth, doesn't look like a fire-eater – but he drove into Adelaide yesterday determined to set it aflame.

He and his wife told me so. They said they wanted to wake us up to the truth about flying saucers.

Beings from outer space were on earth to assist with the forthcoming radical cosmic adjustment, they told me.

**Mr Robinson said he'd been in contact with spacemen through telepathy, shortwave radio and TV. He was sure they were here to help not harm.**

Mrs. Robinson said they were used to scepticism, but there was too much evidence nowadays for people to scoff for long. She said that to show how earth people could be lifted up, a space craft had once focused a beam of light on her – and she was weightless!

They're both quite serious about all this. They've lectured their way from Perth to Cairns and back. Their Adelaide lecture will be in the Leavitt Hall, Wakefield Street, at 8 p.m. on Sunday.

Their message is, "An event of momentous importance will occur before Christmas. But we don't want to alarm you – just to prepare you"  
(Robbins, *The News*, 28.10.1967).

The weeks the Robinsons spent in Adelaide before making the return journey to Perth were evidently busy, for they reported the following on their return:

***OUR TOUR "THE LAST ROUND UP": Culminated in a Breakthrough in Adelaide, where we were on TV Four times; around Australia on National Radio & filled a good sized Hall to overflowing (Shalam Light, December 1967, p. 3).***

One more newspaper article has been found prior to Christmas 1967. With only a few weeks to go Fred and Mary Robinson had arrived back in Perth, where they went all-out with publicity, even playing the Noah card, which was used as the headline: "Noah Predicts Huge Spacelift" (*The News*, Tuesday, 5.12.1967).

The description of Fred in the opening to this article is initially flattering, then creative, and ultimately frank:

His manner is commanding in a quiet gentle way. His eyes are clear and confident and he has a pointed snow-white beard which

waggles when he talks. And he talks a lot (*The News*, Tuesday, 5.12.1967).

A bolded sentence early in this article quotes Fred saying something I had not, until reading this, heard Fred say before. “I am the new Noah,” he said. “The leader of the space people told me that” (ibid.). I suspect Mary wisely discouraged Fred from using this line again, for while it may have made good copy, it ironically placed Fred in the same boat as Noah – someone to be laughed at. I think it likely that Fred was told he was to be a ‘new Noah’ by one of the channels they communicated with. This article went much further than most, using Fred’s own words and claims to discredit him:

“I have to warn the people of Australia about the tremendous cosmic readjustment which the planet earth is about to undergo.

#### **THE END**

“This will be the end of the world as we know it, but it will be the beginning of a far, far better one. Messages, weather patterns, the current position of the earth in the universe suggest that it should happen around Christmas” he said, beard-a-quiver.

“The end will come with a nuclear explosion in the East – probably in the Holy Land,” said Noah II, who plans to lead the

get-away not in an ark but in a flying saucer.

“Superior beings from other planets will provide a mammoth space lift, and take us away to safety – probably the moon.

“My message to the public is don’t turn and run from them. They are friendly and our only hope of survival.

“Many of them are on earth paving the way for the invasion.” said the Armadale prophet.

*Above: Mr. and Mrs. Fred Robinson.  
(The News, 5.12.1967).*

The journalist, having assisted Fred in demolishing his own credibility, creates an unflattering but arresting image of Mary as a smitten and submissive wife shuffling their pamphlets, while Fred continues to expound his theories.

As he spoke his tiny grey haired wife Mary, piled a desk high with space research pamphlets and diagrams of the universe.

“Further confirmation can be found in Revelations,” he said (*The News*, Tuesday, 5.12.1967).

The article concludes with a history of their activities since they were married:

The couple were married a year ago and spent their honeymoon on a 10,000 mile mini-bus tour spreading their beliefs to all States. But at that stage few people wanted to know about the Robinson's' telepathic messages from outer space.

This year they celebrated their first wedding anniversary with another assault on the eastern States, concentrating on country towns (*The News*, Tuesday, 5.12.1967).

The Robinsons were well prepared for being misunderstood, laughed at and generally being *a fool for God*. Ogamisama would have been proud. The Robinsons always said, *we don't mind if people don't believe us, but we say what we believe to be true*; and they encouraged others who listened to them to have the courage of their own convictions, whatever the consequences.

The photograph of the Robinsons in this article is a semiotic essay in itself. Mary is leaning in towards Fred's shoulder and looking expectantly and ecstatically to the heavens. Fred, with his pointy Saint Germain styled beard, is looking straight ahead – facing his prophecies squarely and confidently. The caption reads: 'Perth, today: Fred Robinson (76), of Armadale, looks just right for an important role he expects to play at Christmas' (*The News*, 5.12.1967). With the publicity side of the prophecy completed, the Robinsons were already busy producing what they believed would be their last *Shalam Light* newsletter.

## **Christmas 1967: The Final Words**

The *Shalam Light* for December 1967 is a strange mixture of dire warning and joyous anticipation. The opening to this 'Xmas Greetings 1967' edition begins:

***Beloved Ones:-***

*Rejoice – give thanks, that GOD is in control these Latter Days, and that we are not left to the mercy of those who would plunge us into disaster.*

**THE GREAT ILLUMINATION :**

*Is about to take place– Limitless Love has promised to reveal Himself by Xmas.– Oh what a Xmas. . .<sup>291</sup> Has there ever been such anticipation? (Fred & Mary Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, December 1967, p. 3).*

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<sup>291</sup> This is not intended to be an ellipsis; it is a *Robinsonian* triple full stop. I have for this section kept all their quirky punctuation marks and layout exactly as they appeared. It is part of the strange drama being enacted through the text.

Having already quoted some of the Robinsons' remarks about this prophecy when introducing the 'Last Round Up' at the beginning of the Chapter, I will explore their answer to the most common question they received, and examine some of the general advice they gave their readers regarding the preparation for the *End of the World as we know it*, or more happily, *The Christmas Illumination*, only a couple of weeks away from the publication of this last *Shalam Light*. Christmas 1967 was the all important date that would forever change the world as we knew it – they had no doubts.

## The Uncomfortable Question

In the following excerpt the question they intend to address is completely ignored. Instead, they reiterate their own message, as if the question frustrates them and is not really worthy of being asked:

### WHAT IF NOTHING HAPPENS BY XMAS?

*We are constantly asked this question. Surely it is clear, to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear that the world, in its wantonness has run itself into a deadlock from which there is no extrication without Divine Intervention. Six years ago The Christ began manifesting and on the 13/11/1961 gave forth this message:–*

*“ By the first second of the first hour of the seventh Christmas morn hence, I will have revealed Myself to The Universe through nuclear evolution ”*

*We at 'SHALAM' feel called to pass this message on to all who will listen. .*  
(Fred & Mary Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, December 1967, p. 5).

Having reminded the reader of the prophecy through Richard Graves of the Universal Link, the Robinsons continue to comment on the question being asked, rather than answering it directly:

*In the past, repentance has served to alter the pre-stated destiny of man, as in the case of Nineveh-Jonah 3. Nevertheless, while repentance cannot fail to lessen the burden of both individual and nation, we interpret this statement as an irrevocable proclamation of ultimate timing.*

*True enough, man still has freedom of choice – up to a point – and the intervention is dependent on man's pressing of the button ...* (Fred & Mary Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, December 1967, p. 5).

Quoting more from Richard Graves's prophecy which stated that a human press button device would be used, at which time 'The Universal Revelation' would occur, the Robinsons left the question that they were 'constantly asked' to offer advice on what to

do in the meantime. Some of this kind of advice did filter down to the Universal Brotherhood and can be recognised as the words Mary Robinson used.<sup>292</sup>

**TURBULENT TIMES:**

*We would pass on to you a word of warning. We are living in turbulent times . . . Be not disturbed by appearances – Hold fast to that which you KNOW to be True.*

“I KNOW THAT MY REDEEMER LIVETH”

*The lashing death throes of the negative forces are causing many upsets. . . The old dragon is really on the rampage . . . Armageddon is fought on many fronts. . . We are now in the final battle of the Mental-Armageddon, and you will need the courage of your convictions to pass the test (Mary Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, December 1967, p. 4).*

Another bolded, capitalised and underlined heading addresses both evangelical *Bible bashers* and atheistic *bashers of the Bible*, while also presenting a third proposition, avoiding the either/or binary.

**Armageddon in Full Swing**

The Robinsons couch their modern prophecy in a folksy way, mixing clichés with both biblical and household tropes:

**THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS:**

*Some people read The Bible so diligently that they have shut their minds to the source from which it came. . . Others have forgotten that there is such a Book, or consider it is just fantasy.*

*But, there are those who still read The Bible, and with an Open Mind, knowing that HE who wrote it, writes even better to-day – and is NOT dead. . . Some people are so conditioned to fear false prophets that GOD can't get a word in edgeways.*

*Many are tied to the apron strings of organised beliefs or hypnotised by a false but accepted way of life, dulled by drugs and fully engulfed in the rat race.*

*ARMAGEDDON– THE VALLEY OF DECISION– IS IN FULL SWING.  
Salvation is an individual matter. No one can save you but yourself – by your own decision to join The Sheep, to conform to Universal Law –*

**TO LOVE GOD AND LOVE ONE ANOTHER**  
(Mary Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, December 1967, p. 4).

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<sup>292</sup> Much of this December 1967 *Shalam Light* text was written by Mary Robinson as the main editor. Where in doubt about the primary author, or where collaboration has made it difficult to pick the author, I have attributed the text to both, as co-editors; however, where I am sure (for a variety of reasons) of the identity of the primary author I have attributed it to either Fred or Mary Robinson (see footnote 266).



‘Signs’ of the selections to come were mixed in their provenance, the Biblical sitting alongside terms from UFO sources, regarding for instance the effect of cosmic rays bombarding the planet: ‘the increasing vibrations’.

**CHARACTERISTIC TENDENCIES:**

*Our characteristic tendencies are becoming more pronounced with the accentuation of the Cosmic Rays. We need to watch our own weaknesses and keep a sense of humour in regard to our neighbours. . . Kind people are getting kinder, clumsy people are becoming more clumsy – and how! . . .* (Mary Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, December 1967, p. 4).

Mary later reduced the equation to ‘*The good is getting gooder and the bad is getting badder*’. An idiom was developing, which Black was to explore in Chapter 2 of her ethnography of the Universal Brotherhood (1984). Black identifies its authors as ‘the Prophet’: Fred Robinson; ‘the Discerner’: Mary Robinson; and ‘the Preacher’: Stephen Carthew (Black, 1984 p. 66), noticing that they recycled and adapted terminology derived from the various channels, teachers and Communities of the world’s New Age pioneers, to produce ‘The tools for the ‘Work’ (ibid.) undertaken in the UBI Community. While all three did contribute to the evolution of a UBI specific ‘idiom’, most of this language was formed during the period explored in this thesis – the period prior to Fred Robinson’s appeal to the *New Agers* in the 1970s. Black notes the power and role of this ‘idiom’ in operation:

**Tools for the Work: Creating the World of the Brotherhood**

To enter the Brotherhood is to go into a created world in which leading people have supplied a language that defines a special set of processes and procedures for implementing the tenets of the Vision. To become part of the Brotherhood, or to understand it, is therefore to develop competence in, and command of, the idiom that the Prophet, the Preacher and the Discerner have originated and promulgated. It is in this idiom that the community’s utopian endeavour is presented and represented as ‘the Work’. ‘The Work’ means daily bringing the experience of residents to ‘harmonise with the Consciousness’. This is accomplished by the idiom of the Brotherhood and through the events and procedures which that idiom both designates and constitutes. The idiom of the Brotherhood and the events and procedures that it serves, are the principal tools that have been used by the Preacher, the Prophet and the Discerner to create the Brotherhood world, and to maintain it (Black 1984, p. 66).

It is important however to recognise that many Community members contributed to the 1970s idiom; as did various *teachings* from the books which we absorbed during the life of the Community in the 1970s and early 1980s, prior to Black’s ethnographic research

visits. The idiom kept evolving until 1987. Findhorn, the Scottish Community considered by most members of the Universal Brotherhood as a sister/brother Community, had been developing its own idiom via its own genealogical roots (see Sutcliffe 2003), and this was already being transferred to the New Age network. This linguistic transference is not recognised by Black. Further: a proportion of the terms used were simply part of the *lingua franca* of the 1970s alternative-cosmic-back-to-the-land movement, rather than an invention of the leaders. The specific confluence of these *linguae francae* did however create a UBI communal language which, due to its unusual lexicon, bordered on dialect. This was particularly so when explaining the governance, rules and communal life-style to non-members. Strange, unearthly words from both *Urantia* and *Oahspe* especially contributed to this strangeness. The term ‘drujas’, *Oahspe*’s term for negative entities or disincarnate spirits thought to be roaming about the cities trying to ‘feed off’ and encourage addictions (*Oahspe* 1960, p. 758 v.12–15) was a challenge for the uninitiated, its use usually a source of some humour. In 1967 however, the language was moving into a mode of high seriousness.

The Christmas 1967 *Shalam Light*, thought to be the last before *The Illumination*, was a *tips-for-salvation* edition that restated many of the Robinsons’ essential teachings. It is a particularly rich source of the later Universal Brotherhood idiom. For anyone who lived in the Community for any length of time, the following excerpts will have a familiar ring – as regards both the teachings and the language used.

## **Advice for Illumination**

The Robinsons were presenting the final Doomsday message, and the formulae show how they ultimately represented themselves:

### **BE RECEPTIVE:**

*According to your ability to open yourself to this great influx of Love and Light and Joy, so will you be filled. Beloved Ones– do not sit and wait to see what will happen– for then you will be caught napping (like the Foolish Virgins in The Parable).*

*It is only the receptive heart that can be filled. If you are sad you close the door to Spirit– have faith– look up to GOD, rejoicing, and KNOW that All IS well. “All is going according to Plan and all is well” (Mary Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, December 1967, p. 3).*

Being receptive to cosmic vibrations was always a key principle of the Robinsons' teachings to my generation. 'Sadness' was out; it was seen to 'close the door to spirit'. Yet key thoughts were often counterbalanced by their own contraries. If for instance 'discontent is the seed of creativity', 'discontent' could be accepted, even welcomed, so long as a creative solution could *spring forth* from it. Given the basis of so much of 'the idiom' in sustained reading and channelled sources, it is difficult to know how far such formulae were original. We picked up 'Principles' and 'Truths' – and thus an idiom – from anywhere. The Robinsons often said '*If the Devil dropped a truth we would pick it up and use it*'. They were eclectic, even in their advice on the coming '*Illumination*'.

### **Decrees and 'Living In The Now'**

Mary, who was the clearly the author of this personal advice to the *Shalam Light* readership, recommends the following spiritual techniques to help fellow 'seekers'.

#### **THE USES OF DECREES:**

*The more often you use decrees, and the more energy you put into them the quicker will you get results.*

*Hold to one decree until you achieve a desired result, then change to one more suited to your needs. Select your decree for the day then say it or sing it as often as you can – 50 to 100 times a day (Mary Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, December 1967, p. 6).*

#### **CALL THE LIGHT:**

*Call the Christ Light to yourself, and to that which you, personally, are guided to call for. . .*

*"Oh Christ of god, grow thou in me,  
Illuminate me Now"  
"Oh Christ of God, grow thou in me  
Envelope .....*

*Arrange the Decree in rhythmic form to fit the need (Mary Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, December 1967, pp. 4–5).*

By the time the Community was in operation the last of these decrees had morphed into the following generic decree: '*Oh Christ of God, grow thou in me; bless the Earth and its humanity*'. We often said this at services together, believing it to be a useful decree/prayer for almost all occasions, because it asked for personal growth from a divine source, while also calling on God to bless humanity – creating a cycle of receiving and giving, giving and receiving, another 'key'.

*Living in the now* was a central principle. It was perhaps ironic that the Robinsons could on one hand be so focussed, even fixed, on an event in the future, while teaching the importance of the present. The Christmas prophecy, a *cosmic-clock-fact*, was not seen as *living in the future*, but simply a date by which people needed to learn how to live in the now:

**LIVE IN THE NOW:**

*Live always in the NOW – for this is the Law. Only by applying The Law in the present can GOD work through you and guide you. . . ‘Sufficient unto the day’ . . .* (Mary Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, December 1967, p. 5)

## **Christmas Greetings**

The only reference in this ‘XMAS GREETINGS 1967’ edition of *Shalam Light* to the age old idea of a Christmas greeting is Mary Robinson’s poem. This is a heartfelt blessing, but also a teaching text, with instructions to trust God to ‘guide you through’ the dramas associated with the fast approaching *Illumination Day*:

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### **HAPPY CHRISTMAS**

A HAPPY CHRISTMAS, DEAR FAMILY OF GOD  
A HAPPY ILLUMINATION TO YOU ALL.  
MAY GOD BLESS YOUR RISEN THINKING  
AS YOU ANSWER THE CALL.

MAY YOUR LIGHT BULBS GLEAM AND GLOW  
AS THE COSMIC POWER-HOUSE IS TURNED ON.  
RECEPTIVITY IS HALF THE BATTLE,  
SO LET ANTICIPATION SPUR YOU ON.

THE FUTURE LIES IN CLOUDED MYSTERY,  
WE ONLY KNOW THAT ‘ALL IS WELL’;  
SO TRUST IN HIM TO GUIDE YOU THROUGH,  
THE STILL SMALL VOICE WILL SOUND THE BELL.

LET LOVE AND LIGHT AND JOY  
ENCIRCLE ALL YOU DO  
THEN HAPPY WILL THIS CHRISTMAS BE  
SHALAM’S BLESSING ON EACH OF YOU...  
(Mary Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, December 1967, p. 7).

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The capitalised words of this text were spaced at least three times more than needed, revealing Mary's care over the presentation of her work. The words 'so let anticipation spur you on' in the second stanza represent the catch-cry of all who become involved in any form of the anticipatory spiritual promises of religious prophecy. Anticipation spurs one on to keep trying. The *big-loss* (end of the world) synchronises with the *big-win* (inauguration of a New Age) to create a vortex of *prophecy-addiction* – and there are always new and alluring prophecies to tempt new addicts. The 21<sup>st</sup> of December 2012 is a currently popular date for the cosmic ending of the world. As gauged by aficionados of this Mayan Calendar Prophecy, this date equates with the end of a 5,125.36 year great cycle of evolution (<http://www.viewzone.com/endtime.html>, accessed 23.3.2010). Not many in the Universal Brotherhood Community took very seriously the prophetic utterances of Fred Robinson – who never gave up finding new 'dates' on which to hang the *coming changes*.

### **Confirming Cosmic Changes**

The bulk of this Christmas edition was taken up with confirmatory messages about the imminent cosmic changes, from a number of sources. The 'cosmic being' known by the names 'Truth', 'Limitless Love' or 'Limitless Love and Truth' (first channelled by Richard Graves and sculpted by Liebie Pugh – the founders of the Universal Link) is given a hearing in *Shalam Light* through two channels, Ann Herbstreith and Dorothy Davis.<sup>293</sup> Herbstreith's source emphasises the importance of the *Linking Work* and the

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<sup>293</sup> *Hidden Secrets Revealed: By I AM THAT I AM* (1965) was channelled through Ann Herbstreith, and made available for US \$2.00 via Daniel Fry's 'Classified Department' in his Newsletter, *Understanding*, vol.10, no. 4 (p. 20) (<http://danielfry.com/daniels-writings/understanding-newsletter-1965/vol-10-no-4/>, accessed, 12.10.2010). Fry's *Understanding* can be seen here to connect the UFO network with the Universal Link's Spiritualist network. Such interconnectivity between these streams enabled syncretism, which was further reified by the Robinsons' *Shalam Light*. The same process can be observed in the supposed connection between Dorothy Davis and the Eastern mystic Yogananda which (by association) aligns the Spiritualist messages of the Universal Link with Yogananda's teachings. Dorothy and Ray Davis founded a group by the name of Robin's Return from their home in Grand Rapids, Michigan in the mid-1960s. They said they received messages from Paramahansa Yogananda while being unaware of who he was. In 1965, Robin, Dorothy Davis's son by a previous marriage, was killed when his bomber was shot down over Vietnam. After his death, both Ray and Dorothy began to receive messages from him, as well as from Yogananda and other masters. They gathered the messages together and began to publish them, first as a booklet entitled *Robin's Return* and then in a newsletter. During the last six months of 1966, *Chimes*, the Spiritualist magazine, ran a series of articles by the Davis's. Reader response led to the establishment of a network of people who received the Davis material. Though many of the early messages were from Robin, over the years the majority came from master spiritual teachers and a divine Spirit usually referred to as 'I AM'. The Davis's moved amongst the Universal Link circles promoting the 1967 prophecy ([http://www.novelguide.com/a/discover/ear\\_01/ear\\_01\\_00135.html](http://www.novelguide.com/a/discover/ear_01/ear_01_00135.html), accessed 15.3.2010).

need for harmony between the Light Centres. This channel, like most, endlessly repeats the message – although what the message is remains difficult to decipher.

**LIMITLESS LOVE AND TRUTH** Through Anne Herbstreith. .

*“I AM LIMITLESS LOVE AND TRUTH – and the Truth of My Message shall reach all hearts that shall receive or be receptive ...*

*“Now – the Linking has been established – or the Centres are in alignment – but now the greatest work is only begun. These Light Centres MUST function in harmony. . . HOW? . . . By Lighting all cells in the body, purifying, refining, until the body is Light . . . As above so below...*

*... Each Centre has a specific work, or phase of this enlightening. No one centre could do the work of the whole body, or ME. I need all MY centres in functioning order, in full dedication in the radiating of MY Limitless Love each day – so must it reach, permeate, all cells of the body of man, the body of the Earth Planet and in THE TOTAL LIGHT OF IT is the Illumination – which is the raising up of the consciousness of man – and this is what is required to raise the Earth Body into its rightful place.*

*All Planets await the return of the Earth – as all the Heavenly Host await the return of the souls of Lights . . . All must be raised... ” (Ann Herbstreith, in Shalam Light, December 1967, p. 8).*

These channelled writings are a study within themselves, in content, tone and style. From the Robinsons’ point of view Dorothy Davis seals the prophetic deal with the following:

**LIMITLESS LOVE** through Dorothy Davis, July 1967.

*My Beloved: I AM now overshadowing My Earth and move to lay a mantle of LIGHT over MY Earth in a very short time. . . LOVE only and LIGHT only will be the manifestation of MY Coming. . . Lands which are not ruled by MY Love will be moved into a realm of sorrow, for they see not the glory . . . Doves of Love and Light will fly over, releasing a mighty power and just as in the old Bible story, they will carry the olive branch, only this time it will indicate that the New Earth has emerged and the old has passed away. . . Mourn not for those who go with the old, for they only sleep to awaken at another age, to be given another opportunity to see My Face (Dorothy Davis, in Shalam Light, December 1967, pp. 8–9).*

As if relating a scientific fact this channel’s August report further confirms ‘The Messages’ through Richard Graves, and the growing number of channels in *The Universal Link*. Many were picking up each other’s thought forms from the ethers – and from collators of these *channellings*, such as Fred and Mary Robinson. These networks

of communication became a reality for the New Age *world within the world* – as Mary described it. A world was being created which was separate and apart from the normal, mundane, decidedly *uncosmic consciousness* of the ordinary workaday person – the unenlightened *hu-men* and *hu-women* of Earth during the dying moments of the Piscean Age.

Even the language that came through Davis (this time from ‘I AM’), has moved away from the dictionary definitions of the words used. The word ‘vocalise’ is used to fill a *meaning-void* for a word not yet coined. ‘Sadness’ and ‘sorrow’ are seen as being able to transmogrify themselves into ‘joy’ at ‘another time’ – almost as if they were proper nouns, and so entities with autonomous human agency, while the ‘Plan’ is just as animated and *agentic*:

**August 1967:** “*Plan is now complete. Sun and Moon are now moving into a new force-field. Light and Love are the new Forces that will surround and vocalise My Earth. Plan is moving into its last days and My Joy is great.*

*Oh, My Beloved, I tell you – I AM – and My People are robed in Joy. Sadness & sorrow know no joy but they will arise & know Joy another time. Powerful & undeviating are the ways of My GOD & HE understands souls who are not to be saved for My Earth but will be returned to another set of circumstances & sorrows where they may be awakened” (I AM, Through Dorothy Davis, August 1967) (Davis, in Shalam Light, December 1967, p. 9).*

It was a bizarre world of anticipatory excitement, yet one which none of those in the Community during the 1970s knew much about. We could have read about these 1967 prophecies in the Robinsons’ old *Shalam Light* magazines, which were freely available to us, but it was ‘Now’, as Fred assured us then – *an action cycle* – and too much reading and research was deemed a waste of precious time.

An exciting, feeling-based, world of ‘nowness’ was to occur in 1971 when that ‘Now’ became a central plank of the evolving countercultural version of the New Age. The release of *Be Here Now* (1971) was concomitant with Fred Robinson’s arrival on the Australian countercultural, back-to-the-land New Age scene. In a confluence of influences that epitomised the textual hybridity of the times, I was reading *Be Here Now* alongside David Spangler’s ‘Limitless Love and Truth’ transmissions from Findhorn, and the books on Fred’s recommended reading list, such as *Oahspe* and *Urantia* – but

always being careful to remember to *Be Here Now*.<sup>294</sup> Fred saw himself as providing information that would save us time, so that we could focus on *The Work* we New Agers had been born to do: ‘building the new’.<sup>295</sup>

The idea that a spiritual teacher does research for their students is clearly problematic. The Information Revolution facilitated by the Internet makes reliance on a teacher’s research a less likely phenomenon, even though closed and exclusive religious communities may be able to stunt members’ curiosity by blocking the use of the Internet or discouraging the reading of any material which is contrary to the group’s beliefs. In the case of the Robinsons and the later Universal Brotherhood, blocking information was rarely an issue. There was so much new material that confirmed, expanded and sharpened the cosmic picture that we had little time or desire to engage in research that checked or challenged the ‘New Age Information’ the Robinsons presented.

### **‘Pertinent Messages from Space Brothers’**

The following extract from this three page article (*Shalam Light*, December 1967, pp. 10–12) is pin-pointedly congruent with the Robinsons’ own message. The tight circle of confirmatory communication tended to recycle its own ideas within the network, even if unconsciously:

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<sup>294</sup> *Be Here Now* (also referred to as *Remember, Be Here Now*) is a seminal 1971 book on spirituality, yoga and meditation by the Western born yogi and spiritual teacher Ram Dass (a.k.a. Dr. Richard Alpert). The title of the book comes from a statement his guide, Bhagavan Das, made during Ram Dass’s journeys in India. The book is in four sections. The first section is a short biography of his life, describing his successes as a psychologist, his research with Timothy Leary into Psychedelics at Harvard, and his subsequent anxiety when this research does not resolve his spiritual questions. He then describes his first journey to India and his initiation into a Guru/Chela relationship with Neem Karoli Baba, and his spiritual renaming as Baba Ram Dass, or “servant of god”. The second section, the largest, is a free-form collection of metaphysical, spiritual and religious aphorisms, accompanied by illustrations. The third section is a manual for starting on a yogic or spiritual path. The last section contains a list of recommended books on religion, spirituality and consciousness ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Be\\_Here\\_Now\\_\(book\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Be_Here_Now_(book)), accessed 16.8.2011).

<sup>295</sup> The term ‘building the new’ came out of the tapes and writing of David Spangler who shaped Findhorn for the 1970s and beyond, and introduced a less prophetic and apocalyptic, and a more personal-growth oriented suite of channelled teachings with more appeal to the next generation of Seekers (Sutcliffe 2003). ‘Building the New’ gradually replaced the anachronistic term ‘The Work’, which was used by older Theosophists and the channels of Ascended Masters during the Robinsons’ generation of spiritual activism: ‘between around 1967 and 1974 the ‘New Age’ emblem was passed – like a relay baton – from sub-cultural pioneers to countercultural baby boomers’ (Sutcliffe 2003, p. 112).



... We, who come in craft your people have called *Flying Saucers*, come in the One Light of the ONE CREATOR, Our All-knowing ONE; come with concepts of Brotherhood, of LIGHT, Enlightenment beyond the wildest dreams of your peoples as they walk in their daily lives on the surface of your planet.

Our craft are massed in areas outside of your planet awaiting the time for descent to the surface & close to the surface that we may assist your people at the time of the Changes ...

***THE TIME IS SHORT:*** We have stated this before & months & years have passed . . . However, Time, as you know, in our understanding, in our cycles, is NOT time as you on this planet know it . . . And Time is indeed short according to the computation of magnetic cycles & Frequencies . . . THE COSMIC CLOCK itself stands poised at MIDNIGHT . . . Tremendous Forces are being barely held in leash on your Planet between Nations . . . The thought forms built into the Ethers of violence expressed in words and deeds is [sic] indeed bringing into being a tremendous unleashing of such violence in third dimensional form upon your planet's surface . . . PREPARE yourselves, in consciousness, without fear, with Knowledge, with UNDERSTANDING, with LOVE & in Stability of Being for The Changes which come . . . Our Mission is one of Enlightenment, under the auspices of the Solar Tribunal & Galactic Tribunals governing this Section of Space . . . May the One Light be yours & may you be at One with IT . . . Adonai vassu . . . In the Light of The All-Knowing ONE, we bid you farewell.....” (Channel Marianne Francis, Solar Light Centre, Oregon).’

(The above is a fair average sample of the innumerable Messages now coming through every available Channel, especially in The Western Centres of Civilisation . . . ‘The Writing is on the Wall, so that all who run may read,’ if they wish to . . . Vital individual decisions must be made before Xmas this year . . . Ed.) (Fred & Mary Robinson, *Shalam Light*, December 1967, pp. 10–12).<sup>296</sup>

It is useful to know that the Robinsons believed the above to be a ‘fair average sample’ of the channelling being produced within the Universal Link and the *spiritualised flying saucer* networks of the period. The ‘sameness’ in the prophecies can, with hindsight, be adjudged as recycled *confirmatory-confirmations*; reifying each other, the messages seem to prove the prophecy. Intellectual theories of logical fallacy were not popular amongst the ‘intuition’ focussed Universal Link *propheteers* of 1967.

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<sup>296</sup> The Biblical quote Fred uses here is actually a combination of two passages. The first is from Daniel 5:5–6 related to *the Writing on the Wall of Belshazzar’s Palace* which reads: ‘In the same hour came forth fingers of a man’s hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote’ (Verse 5, KJV); ‘Then the king’s countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another’ (Verse 6, KJV). The expression began to be used figuratively from the early eighteenth-century: that is, foretelling of danger where no actual writing or wall was involved (<http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/416550.html>, accessed 23.3.2010). The second quote is ‘And the LORD answered me, and said, “Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it”’ (Habakkuk 2:2, KJV).

## Liebie Speaks from Beyond the Grave

For the Robinsons the channelled messages had even more impact, in that they had personal contact with many of the sources. After her own death Liebie Pugh,<sup>297</sup> regarded as the architect of the Universal Link movement, was believed by some to have spoken through ‘Instrument J’ from Auckland, New Zealand. The Robinsons evidently respected Instrument J; it is likely that Mary met her/him on her around-the-world investigative mission in 1964. In any case, they saw fit to publish an excerpt of this channelling, which would then have gone out to the *Shalam Light* international mailing list and thus be read by Richard Graves, Peter and Eileen Caddy, Anthony Brooke and Monica Parish, and others who were themselves either channelling or speaking under the banner of the Universal Link and the Universal Foundation:

### **LIEBIE SPEAKS:**

*I have been hoping I could soon speak to you . . . The great One-Gabriel – has told me that I may, if I take time and not become excited over those things which I desire to say . . . But a little times since I came to The Eternal Light; I was one of the messengers & one of the instruments used by The All Highest for a great & wondrous purpose – but, I was only one . . . (Liebie Pugh, purportedly through Instrument J, reprinted in *Shalam Light*, December 1967, p. 13).*

Instrument J must have been aware of the implications of channelling Pugh, and perhaps thought it wise not to reveal her name. Channels channelling channels, and then being assessed by other channels, created an over-irrigated and intensely humid hothouse in the frantic last months of prophesy and admonition before the expected *Christmas Illumination*. Someone from the antipodes offering advice from the so recently departed and revered teacher and founder of the Universal Link, may well have put a strain on this loosely shackled, but tightly inbound group of prophesiers. Those at the centre of the Universal Link movement in England, did not reprint the following Instrument J message:

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<sup>297</sup> In January 1966, Liebie Pugh was given a prophecy of her death in December of that year. After Pugh died in December 1966, members of the Universal Link various groups discovered that ‘Limitless Love is appearing with ever greater frequency in the actions, and to the vision, of more and more people.’ Thus the work of the Universal Link and the Universal Foundation (formed by Anthony Brooke and Monica Parish) became the linking together of groups and individuals who were working toward the *spiritual evolution* of mankind around the world: ‘These people form a vanguard who are attuned to the cosmic lights and are awaiting the yet-to-appear day of manifestation which will mark the Christing of the whole earth and the beginning of the Golden Age’ ([http://www.novelguide.com/a/discover/ear\\_01/ear\\_01\\_00135.html](http://www.novelguide.com/a/discover/ear_01/ear_01_00135.html), accessed 15.3.2010, scroll down to ‘Universal Link’ entry).

*... On Earth I was but one of His Instruments – I take no credit to myself whatsoever . . . If, at any time, I felt a little proud at being used, I knew that I must not take the pride to myself . . . I was not in harmony with many, for some would liken me to a power almost as that of Jesus The Christ – but that was not so . . . I was but an instrument used for the purpose of The All Highest (Liebie Pugh, purportedly through Instrument J., reprinted in *Shalam Light*, December 1967, p. 13).*

A question of the greatest relevance is put to the discarnate Liebie Pugh. The answer is carefully hedged, notably so when compared with almost all the Robinsons' other Universal Link channelled messages of certainty:

*Q. Would you stand by the prophecy given re. December 1967?*

*Ans. These things have been prophesied for many, many periods of time, & even at this time “no man knoweth” . . . But, change in world conditions will come, & much sorrow will be seen at this time, as you already know from The Great One, Gabriel, who speaks to you . . . (ibid., pp. 13–14).*

The last question put to (or through) this New Zealand channel relates directly to the politics within the Universal Link at that rather intense time. The final comment in the answer is especially telling, as it alludes to a lack of humility in the ranks:

*Q. Would you advise us to send this message to St Anne's?*

*Ans. It would be good, & to give credit to that one of great clairvoyance who has been exposed to this sublimity. . . Also to give him my deepest love and thanks, and tell him to continue in the greatest Truth. . . This Spirit of Truth goes to many – you, in New Zealand have experienced HIS vibration. . . But He goes to those who do not desire earthly things & and are humble in their approach to The Divine One.*

*All workers must go forth perceiving and observing, yet never become prideful (ibid., p. 14).*

The phrase 'Give him my deepest love' seems to refer to Richard Graves, Liebie's associate. In signing off with a closing prayer, Liebie, coming through Instrument J, promises to come again:

*Oh Father, let these our friends know that we on our side of life are aiding them in their mission, and that I, Liebie, will come again to speak to them with Thy permission. . . O, Father in Heaven, O GOD, aid us in our quest” (Auckland, N.Z. Instrument J) (ibid.).*

I have not come across another Instrument J communication in the extant *Shalam Lights* or in the available literature on the Universal Link; noting this, I suspect this channel

was not given credence within its circle of influence. Perhaps Instrument J decided to focus more on ‘The Great One, Gabriel’ after Christmas 1967. But *Shalam Light* has still not arrived at that fateful Christmas. There was still more literature that needed to be read.

### **Anthony Brooke**

Directly underneath this channelled message from Liebie Pugh was an advertisement for Anthony Brooke’s *Revelation for the New Age* (1967) – replete with a glowing description. This is somewhat anomalous, because it would have been unlikely to arrive in Australia until after the prophesied Christmas deadline, about which Brooke’s booklet and the Robinsons’ *Shalam Light* was so certain. To get the book a day or so before enlightenment, when it would surely become redundant, doesn’t make sense – but then ‘sense’ was not really the flavour of the month of December 1967.

***REVELATION FOR THE NEW AGE:*** *This is the title of a new booklet by Anthony Brooke . . . This is a compilation of speeches & writings of the author 1965–7. These are now available under one cover in a single attractive & compact volume. The book comprises 7 items.*

*“TOWARDS HUMANITY” . . . “THE TIME IS NOW” . . . ARE THESE THE SIGNS” . . . “AN OPEN LETTER” . . . “THE EVOLUTION OF HUMAN UNITY IN A WORLD SOCIETY” . . . “THE UNIVERSAL LINK REVELATION” . . . “TOWARDS A NEW HEAVEN & NEW EARTH”.*

*Order from The Universal Foundation, 71 Princes House, Kensington Park Road. London W11. 10/- Stg. Plus Postage if airmail desired. Or from Weisers, 845, Broadway, New York, 10005 U.S.A. 2 U.S. Dollars (Fred & Mary Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, December 1967, p. 14).*

Some extracts of this booklet were reproduced in the space underneath the Contents page this December 1967 *Shalam Light* – not an inch was wasted in this edition. The paragraphs chosen by the Robinsons present the argument for the Universal Link’s prophecy as cogently as any of the Universal Link personnel were able to present it. Brooke employed a Rogerian argument:

*‘Perhaps the comment most often made in criticism of the Universal Link Revelation, is that “no man knoweth the Day nor the hour”, & to fix a date for the events referred to in Matt. 24 is not only unscriptural but absurd, especially when we reflect how often prophecy around this theme has been proved wrong.*

*We may first point out that a period of time, rather than a precise moment is what has been given in the Revelation & we may refer to Amos Ch. 3, v. 7,*

*which tells us that before GOD Acts “HE revealeth HIS Secrets unto HIS Servants the Prophets”.*

*‘The role of prophecy is now assumed by a great number of sensitives & tends, admittedly, to be a somewhat hit and miss affair. In the case of This Revelation, however, the procedure from the very beginning, and the consistency, over a period of 6 years, in which confirmative messages of a most specific kind have been given, is unique in the history of prophecy.’ (Excerpts Anthony Brooke) (Brooke, in Shalam Light, December 1967, p. 2).*

This book of speeches by the descendent of Sir James Brooke, the first White Rajah of Sarawak, added *supra-colonial* credibility to the prophecy. However, Fred and Mary had their own principles to propound, and their own unique take on the New Age, which Fred had been ‘living’ and ‘preparing for’ since 1936. To him, this was the culmination of *The Work* he had started with Ione Long.

### **Fred’s ‘Great Cosmic Forces’**

The last two pages of this Christmas issue were devoted to giving their readership an understanding of *the great cosmic forces* at work during the transition. Fred and Mary clearly put an extra level of thought into this, their final statement before *The End/ The Illumination*, only a few weeks away. Fred is clearly the main author here, Mary editing his message to make it as clear as possible.

#### **Attraction and Repulsion**

*These are two great Cosmic Forces that operate undeviatingly upon all levels of manifestation. . . On the 3 dimensional level they operate as centrifugal & centripetal powers. On the fourth and higher dimensions we see the great Power of Attraction in the emotional world expressed as LOVE and the Force of Repulsion as its opposite (Fred Robinson, in Shalam Light, December 1967, p. 15).*

*The Piscean Age (which, from a cosmic point of view, terminated on 4<sup>th</sup> February, 1962) was a negative Dark Age, during which mankind allowed the Force of Repulsion to get out of balance.*

*The Cycle of Evolution, just ended, brings to a close this unbalanced state of affairs. . The dominance of the force of repulsion in human affairs is over, forever, on this Planet, shortly to be transformed into a self illuminated Planet from which darkness will be banished. We have now entered into The COSMIC Aquarian Age of Enlightenment operating with the Laws & Forces of Attraction – DIVINE LOVE – Manifesting as The Master:– LIMITLESS LOVE AND TRUTH.*

*HIS constant message over the past six years has been “ALL IS WELL AND GOING ACCORDING TO PLAN. . . ALL IS WELL” . . . (ibid.).*

Trademark statements such as these appealed to many of the 1970s youth who heard Fred. The assumed authority of his positions, along with the unrestricted rhetorical power he wielded in saying the things he did, gave us the confidence to make massive changes and powerful life-decisions. Our parents cringed at Fred's rhetoric; and this was an extra plus for Fred's authenticity, for we felt that our parents were too cautious, conservative and generally unknowledgeable. Fred also lambasted the universities – another plus for his arguments, for we were already of the opinion that the intellectual activities taught at universities were a waste of time – too complex, impractical, and unsustainable.

### **Fred's Clean Sweep**

While we may have been open to Fred's ideas about a *clean-sweep* to usher in the Aquarian Age, many in 1967 were not impressed with his dogmatic Doomsday utterances. Some dropped away from *Shalam* either during the intense excitement or in its aftermath. However, for Fred this was simply a pruning and purging process, something expected to happen to 'the luke-warm'.

Fred turns in *Shalam Light* to the specifics of the 'preparation'; the conspirators at the International Monetary Fund; and a failed channelled Yogananda prophecy – proposing that it will all come together in a big-bang of synchronised 'cleansing of the Planet':

*As we approach the final stages of 'Preparation', ready for events to be set in motion, by Xmas of this year, we have been getting constant confirmation of The Truth of this statement. For instance – Those who understand the language of those who control the policy of the International Monetary Fund, have been aware that their plans were complete some considerable time ago and even that Great Soul, Yogananda, stated through his channel of communication that there would be a financial crisis early in 1967. . BUT – even in such mundane matters as this "Man proposes, but GOD disposes".<sup>298</sup>  
The complete disintegration of an artificial, manmade materialistic, militaristic, atheistic economy is being compelled to synchronise with God's*

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<sup>298</sup> The quotation 'Man proposes but God disposes' is likely to have come down to us as a direct translation from the Latin of a devotional work by Thomas a Kempis, whose *Of the Imitation of Christ* (circa 1425) contains many insights into spirituality and morals. In Chapter 19, Book 1, we find the following: 'For the resolutions of the just depend rather on the grace of God than on their own wisdom; and in Him they always put their trust, whatever they take in hand. For man proposes, but God disposes; neither is the way of man in his own hands' ([http://www.age-of-the-sage.org/quotations/quotes/man\\_proposes\\_but\\_god\\_disposes.html](http://www.age-of-the-sage.org/quotations/quotes/man_proposes_but_god_disposes.html), accessed 23.6.2011).

*Plan for the cleansing of the Planet.* . (Fred Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, December 1967, p. 15).

Having put to rest any idea that the world might go on as it had, attention is now turned to the ‘Great Drama of the Ages’. In a paean to the forces of ‘RIGHT ACTION’, Fred Robinson explores the consequences of employing ‘The Force of Attraction’:

*The Universal cycles of Expansion & Contraction are also playing their part in this Great Drama of the Ages – Truly, the Greatest Story ever told. . . All cycles of Expansion connected with ‘RIGHT ACTION’ initiated by mortals have no limits set upon them. . They can go on Expanding to Eternity to Infinity. . . BUT, this is the result of man using The Force of Attraction – LOVE & Truth – to expand* (Fred Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, December 1967, p. 16).

Now Fred turns to the consequences of being influenced by the opposite ‘Force of Repulsion’, to make an argument that the ‘cycle of contraction’ was delayed in order to be synchronous with the ‘cleansing of the Planet’:

*When man initiates any action under the influence of the Force of Repulsion (as with those manipulating the world’s man-made systems) then, quite inevitably, he brings into play the Laws & Forces of Contraction; and to this there is a definite limit – it means extinction of all that is unbalanced & detrimental to the well-being of the human race as a whole.*

*We regard the present world situation, in the field of political economy (man made with no regard for Universal Law) as having reached saturation point. . The operation of this state of imbalance was held up, in our opinion to permit it to enter into the cycle of contraction simultaneously with the cleansing of the Planet – an example of how GOD turns all things to good effect . . . If there is one human activity above all others that CANNOT be permitted to go into The Golden Age it is our monetary system – based on the worship of the Golden Calf* (Fred Robinson, in *Shalam Light*, December 1967, p. 16).

Embedded in this last paragraph is another key principle of the Robinsons: ‘How God turns all things to good effect’. This is based on the Biblical verse ‘and we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose’ (Romans 8:28, KJV). All things, in the Robinsons’ schema, were in a final stage of *attunement*.

### **The Death of the Money System**

As Fred Robinson sounded the death knell of the ‘monetary system’ and explained how it ‘CANNOT be permitted’ to go into the New Age; it is important to remember that

this subject had a deep and very personal meaning for him. Fred had been ruined by the Great Depression. His life was defined by this financial collapse. He firmly believed that an International Banking Conspiracy was to blame. He wanted to see them extinguished. *The End of the World as we know it* would do just that – and for him this would be the end of the inequitable and ungodly system. Having taken care of the monetary system, Fred turns his attention towards the standards of ‘our Elder Brothers and their Beloved Leader’.

What follows is a heartfelt call to the readers of *Shalam Light* to make adjustments in their thinking and life-style to align with the new conditions the Robinsons believed would soon prevail on Earth. If the Robinsons were gullible, extreme, or even misguided in their teachings, they were certainly sincere in attempting to live a life of selfless, loving service for the good of the whole world, doing what they believed would be most useful. This meant trying to convince their outer circle of readers to follow more enlightened values, become less attached to money, and more open to the massive cosmic changes on the way.

*We are now being given the opportunity to adjust our Thoughts, actions & standards of value to the standards of our Elder Brothers & their Beloved leader, known as The Christ, but, more recently, by HIS own request as LIMITLESS LOVE AND TRUTH. . .*

*Our Space Brothers & their Leader do not have a money system. . . All their needs are as freely and bountifully supplied as the Sunshine & Fresh Air – so indispensable to human life in a physical body. . . Those who are ready for this great step forward, freely associating with our Space Brothers, will have the incentive, the will & desire to throw away false standards on all levels of awareness. . . Those who are not yet ready will be repelled, both by the Space People & the rapidly changing circumstances upon which their affections & sense of values have been fixed. . (ibid., p.16).*

The warning is strong but specific. While most people will be rejected by the Space People, the judgment is unemotional. Hell-fire and brimstone are replaced by ‘*rapidly changing circumstances . . .*’ a very twentieth-century vision of damnation.

In the final paragraph Fred expounds the cosmic viewpoint, outlining God’s plan for the evolving solar system where Limitless Love and Truth will reign supreme, before making the point doubly clear: only those ‘*Wise Virgins*’ fully ready will be able to experience ‘*The Illumination*’, and thus go forward into the New Age with the children,



the extraterrestrials and the solar system. These nine lines of text represent *Fred's Christmas exhortation/blessing finale*:

*It is a vital part of GOD's Plan for the evolvement of the Solar system that 'LIMITLESS LOVE AND TRUTH' shall reign supreme & Only those souls who wholeheartedly subscribe to the Universal Policy which embraces all that is GOOD, TRUE & BEAUTIFUL can be permitted to continue upon the Planet . .*

*Only those individual souls who are ready to partake of the imminent 'Illumination', The Mystical Union, or 'Marriage' with the Christ (The Wise Virgins of the Parable) will be able to go forward into the Millennium, with the Children & our Brothers from Outer Space. .*

*Love and Blessings to All. . . .*  
*From SHALAM & Fred & Mary (Fred Robinson, in Shalam Light, December 1967, p. 16).*

While Mary also signed this final message, Fred's voice is clearly dominant. It was not until the early 1980s that Mary distanced herself from Fred's more confronting prophetic statements.

## **The Second Second after Christmas**

The Robinsons held two classes a week at Shalam in the weeks before Christmas Eve (*ibid.*, p. 3). I suspect they also *lived every day as if it were their last* – one of their key principles. Mary told me that she and Fred and a band of expectant true-believers took fold-up aluminium chairs to the top of Shalam Hill on that Christmas Eve, ready to usher in the cosmic changes which the Universal Link had, in 1961, predicted would come 'by the first second of the first hour of the seventh Christmas morn hence' (through Richard Graves, 1961). This prophetic chapter in both the history of Shalam and modern prophecy, closed with the second second of Christmas morning. Just what the Robinsons thought at that precise moment is unknown; but one thing I do know is that Mary never became quite so connected with an exact time-framed prophecy again. While never banning Fred from prophesising – he continued to have a date-on-hand for the rest of his life – Mary never became so fully identified with a specific date again. Christmas Eve 1967 was never forgotten.

It is hard to imagine how the Robinsons prepared for the Christmas of 1967. Did they buy Christmas presents for each other, or for Mary's children and grandchildren, just in case Christmas was to go on as normal? What did they do on that Christmas day? Did

they use Mary's little fold-away plastic Christmas tree? Had they prepared a Christmas lunch? Did Mary bake one of her sugarless Christmas fruit cakes? Did their 'knowing' dictate that the parlour be bare? Answers are not available, although Mary's son Graham Broun has the following memories about the lead up to Christmas 1967:

At Christmas 1967 I was living on my father's farm [in Coorow], a long way from Shalam. However I do remember the occasion. Obviously, nothing happened that Christmas, 42 odd years ago. My memories of the occasion are as vague as a long forgotten dream, but I am aware of people pondering the outcome of the prophesy.

I have two impressions left in my mind – one, fairly unfortunately involved me being discouraged from higher learning, presumably because it wouldn't be necessary, and the other, a recollection of Yvonne Swindel's light hearted remarks about wearing clean underwear, just in case we don't have time to change. I suspect that quite a few people, like Yvonne, were not taking the prophecy as seriously as others. I don't know what was in the fridge at Shalam or whether the folding Christmas tree was up or down, but I think Mom and Fred were prepared for any eventuality, including a normal uneventful Christmas. As for me, as a teenager, I was more interested in my own personal endeavours (Graham Broun, email, 16.3.2010).

Noel Broun contributed the following recollections of the time:

I remember Fred being very emphatic that Christmas would be 'THE END'. I did stock up on some petrol and diesel just in case something did happen. Whilst I listened to what Mum and Fred said, and read their literature I never expected anything. I was too busy to go down for that Christmas that year, and didn't really want to be there for it all, so I don't remember what was in the fridge or if they had the Christmas tree up. Mum told me what happened though. I remember they did all go up the hill, expecting something important to happen before midnight with Flying Saucers and the like, then when nothing happened they just came back down again (Noel Broun, telephone conversation, 22.3.2010).

In any case, the Robinsons' formal response to this *Christmas Unhappening* was soon to be forthcoming.

## Chapter 11: Shalam after Christmas Day 1967

When ‘by the first second of the first hour of Christmas morning, 1967’ Limitless Love and Truth had not been revealed to the universe through the medium of nuclear evolution, the Robinsons wrote a two page letter to their readership asking the obvious question: ‘How do we explain HIS apparent non-appearance?’ (*Shalam Newsletter*, December 28, 1967, p. 1). They addressed the Biblical anti-prophetic statement, ‘no man knows the day nor the hour’.<sup>299</sup> Fred always found this injunction a little annoying when reminded of it in the midst of proselytising a specific prophecy, however once the date had passed without incident, he reminded everyone else of it, and then got on with finding another specific date on which to hang his prophetic hat.

This (no)newsletter examines what was meant by the term ‘*Nuclear Evolution*’, coming to the conclusion that something had happened on the inner planes to start the process, and that all was ‘now in readiness for the “Final Episode”, or “Great Universal Revelation”’ (ibid.). The idea that the Universal Link movement had fulfilled its task via ‘an inner Linking Up of HIS Sheep before the “Final Day”’ (ibid.) was put to readers.

Mary, who was clearly the main writer of this letter, suggests that ‘the changing World weather patterns & observable changes in Plant Life’ were a sign that ‘the “Reverse Polarity”, or change of the atomic structure’ (ibid.) was taking place, even if not completed. Such pseudo-scientific postulations did nothing for the Robinsons’ credibility in the public domain. Over the last six months the general populace had been reading articles, listening to radio interviews, and watching media reports about the cosmic changes the Robinsons were predicting via the Universal Link. The date for the “Last Round Up” (as the Robinsons themselves called it) was now behind them, and meetings about ‘sheep and goats’ and ‘wise and foolish virgins’ were less enthusiastically attended. More useful aspects of their message were now seen by most onlookers as part of a failed prophecy-package. Perhaps to have simply said, ‘Sorry, we got the prophecy wrong, but our way of life is still important’ would have been a far better strategy than trying to make sense out of it all.

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<sup>299</sup> ‘But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only’ (Mathew 24: 36, KJV).

Mary told two personal stories to try and shore up a position which held out for still imminent changes. The first related to her trees:

*Have you ever seen a Wattle tree in full blossom in the middle of summer, instead of the middle of winter?*

*Well this is what we will see if it continues as it is heading. Our apricot tree has also lost its sense of direction. It is putting out new growth instead of losing its leaves... (Mary Robinson, in Shalam Newsletter, December 28, 1967, p. 2).<sup>300</sup>*

The second story was about a maintenance team from the P.M.G. and some mysterious sounds on her telephone:

*A few days before Xmas we had a frantic visit from the maintenance men of the P.M.G. – Two burly men, in a big truck. They wanted to know ‘did I have ticks and pips, on our phone’. On assuring them that the phone was quite alright, they turned to go, when suddenly they began to ask questions about Flying Saucers, as if they had a faint suspicion that the noises had something to do with the ‘Saucers’.*

*No sooner had they gone than the phone rang and immediately I heard strange noises above the voice speaking. Having had my attention drawn to it I listened and found, to my amazement, that I was listening to what sounded like a clock – a big clock – and I seemed to get the message “The Cosmic Clock. Time is running out”.*

*Later I heard the clock again and was able to get Fred & a friend to hear it also (ibid.).*

The final section of this letter is made up of a partial admission of the inadequacies of their explanations and an encouragement to keep believing.

*This, rather vague, explanation of the planetary situation seems a very dry bone for the ‘Illumination’ we believe would occur at this time. However, although we have been “Way out” in our understanding of the Master’s Messages, one thing is certain, The Time is Short. Let us all be grateful for the ‘borrowed time’ and use it well to better prepare ourselves for the things that must come to pass quickly. Even though we, in our human limitations, have misinterpreted HIS PLAN, it must all be fulfilled in the near future (ibid.).*

One of Mary’s little-verses-with-a-message concludes this excruciatingly difficult-to-write letter:

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<sup>300</sup> Now that the drama within the text has climaxed, I have returned to amending some of the Robinsons’ quirky punctuation, such as the double and triple full stops.

*Hold tight, dear ones, to what is true to you,  
And try, try hard to see it through.  
Thank God there is a GOD,  
And that HE IS A GOD OF LOVE  
Love and Blessings from Shalam ... Fred and Mary (ibid.).*

It is not surprising that Mary wrote this explanatory Newsletter. During the anticlimactic week or so after a date he had prophesied had been and gone, Fred was not in a catalysing mood.

## **Awaiting New Leaders**

While there is no information on the following five months, the indefatigable Robinsons were by June 1968 reprinting ‘*the Spiritual Lessons from the Master, as given to HIS Borup Centre*’.<sup>301</sup> (Fred Robinson, in *Shalam Newsletter*, June 11, 1968, p. 1) and promoting ‘*HIS new channel for W.A., Mrs. Jacqueline Lander, who now has a group of New-Age young people around her ...*’<sup>302</sup> (ibid.). Fred saw this movement as ‘*The spearhead of the New-Age Army in W.A.*’ (ibid.). Fred’s mixing of sports metaphors with military ones suggested the intense training and fitness needed by those who ‘*UNDERSTAND The Master’s Plan*’, realised that ‘*Nothing Else Matters*’, and were engaged in the ‘*fulfilling of their rightful function*’ (ibid.). While he awaited the youth leaders of my generation to take over the reins, Fred reflects on his own path of what he called ‘*fulfilling my function*’ (ibid.):

*It is just 33 years since I set out to do just that, as a full time job, and many, many times did I look wistfully at the Babes and young people and wonder would I be able to hang on until they matured and were ready to take The Torch from our hands and start on the final sprint to The Goal, to relight the Flame of Love and Truth, which had been allowed to flicker out, so very long ago. And now, the great moment has arrived and my beloved Mary and I will soon be able to make ourselves comfortable on the sidelines, and cheer them on to the Goal, now plainly in sight (Fred Robinson, in *Shalam Newsletter*, June 11, 1968, p. 1).*

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<sup>301</sup> The Borup Group was the Danish connection in the Universal Link. Knud Weiking began channelling a being called Orthon on February 20<sup>th</sup> 1967 (Orthon was also the name of the *Venusian* whom George Adamski claimed to have met in 1952). After Christmas 1967 the followers of Orthon split into several groups (<http://skepticroport.com/sr/?p=438>, accessed 14.3.2020). Knud Weiking kept contact with the Robinsons and passed on further teachings, however no fixed dates were given again. When I met Fred in the last half of 1971 he was often quoting from a Borup booklet titled, *A Voice from Heaven* (available at [http://www.universe-people.com/english/svetelna\\_knihovna/en\\_the\\_voice\\_from\\_heaven.htm](http://www.universe-people.com/english/svetelna_knihovna/en_the_voice_from_heaven.htm), accessed 21.5.2012). Fred said it was a message from the *Space People to the people of Earth*, and that Orthon was their leader. At the same session Fred typically quoted from *Oahspe* (1883), *The Urantia Book* (1955) and *The Advent of the Cosmic Viewpoint* (1965), amongst practical issues of health and well being.

<sup>302</sup> Jacqueline Lander self-published *The Great Awakening* (1969) which featured her channelling. This book is available at the National Library of Australia under the subject heading ‘Cosmology’.

Fred's intense focus on 'timing', something he regarded as his main strength, was, in the eyes of others, his major failing. In his enthusiasm to bring about change, he seized on any date or sense of urgency that was put forward in the channelling they were reprinting, always highlighting those channels whose messages indicated that change was coming soon. While Fred was convinced that cosmic changes would occur in the near future, when pressed he had to admit he could not really say when; openly admitting that *a thousand years are but a day to the Lord*.<sup>303</sup> Time itself was perhaps Fred's favourite lecture subject. He was fascinated with overlapping time cycles; how many moons it was since he met Mary; the precision of the planets, comets and stars (and as an astrologer their effect on the world). Fred was always on time. He expected God to be on time too. The mysterious *flexibility of God's timing* was something he just had to juggle and explain the best he could. Fred was a secondary prophet – he never originated a date. He felt he *fulfilled his function* by spreading the prophecies of others which he believed. The problem was he believed all of them.

While Fred was surely gullible, he also sorely wanted there to be another major economic crash so that many more people would be '*shot out of the rat race*' as he had been, and would thus come to the same conclusions he had reached. This would vindicate his unusual life's work. As he saw it, the hippie phenomenon, with its rejection of the rat race, was a sign that this generation was ready to break out (as he had done) and that they would be the ones to help prepare the planet for the New Age. The following text reveals Fred's innate urgency, and just how much store he placed on those who he believed were soon destined to *take up The Torch*. The text also unpacks the faith he had in us *New-Agers*, and the responsibility he placed on me and those of my generation who aligned themselves with him only three years later:

*The final sprint against The Time Element (for it is much later than we think) is only possible to the ones who are spiritually Fit, Alert & Eager, in every sense of those words. Olympic Games Aspirants voluntarily impose self-discipline upon themselves to the limit of human endurance, because they have, what to them, is a very high incentive – World applause and recognition. The Youth Leaders for the New-Age have a much higher incentive than that. They have an*

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<sup>303</sup> This was Fred's version of the Biblical verse 'But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day' (2 Peter 3:8, KJV) (see also footnote 163).

*UNDERSTANDING of the Cosmic Plan and their own function in that Mighty Plan and no Olympic Champion or Davis Cup Player ever had a fraction of such incentive* (Fred Robinson, in *Shalam Newsletter*, June 11, 1968, p. 1).

Key metaphors Fred (over)used in relation to the *Cosmic Plan* stemmed from the seafaring days of his youth – lifeboats and the *Titanic* analogy played a vital role.<sup>304</sup> Fred writes of ‘*the Preparation Classes Mary initiated on our last Eastern States Tour*’ as being designed to serve as ‘*a species of “Boat Drill”*’ for those who had ‘*acquired an understanding of the needs of the moment*’ and could ‘*maintain order during the hurried evacuation*’ (ibid.). Fred depicted their last six months (since the 1967 Christmas morning non-event) as having ‘*been occupied in ‘Clearing the Decks – Gathering up loose ends etc.’*’ (ibid.), such as circulating instructions from the Borup Group and ‘*introducing a new phase of HIS Work, which is focused on the “City of Light”*’ (ibid.). Fred and Mary and other New Age Groups in Perth deleted the ‘s’ from ‘City of Lights’ to their advantage, in a New-Age marketing campaign, which depicted the city as having been cosmically chosen to ‘*fulfil its function by setting an example to the rest of the World of Sanity based upon UNDERSTANDING ...*’ (ibid.).<sup>305</sup>

Drury and Tillett (1980) refer to Jacqueline Parkhurst’s group *Open Mind*, and their ‘research’ into *Lemurian* civilisations, evidence of which was said to have been found in Western Australia:

The sites near Perth are said to exist on the “etheric”, although no longer present on the physical plane; these derive from the Lemurian civilisation when, according to the group, Australia was joined to Lemuria, becoming isolated only when that continent sank (ibid., p. 10).<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> Fred was turning fourteen when the *Titanic* sank on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April 1912 with the loss of 1,490 lives. He had read everything about it, and by the time I met him he had drawn up an elaborate and powerful analogy that equated the *Titanic* hitting the iceberg, with the world hitting an economic and ecological iceberg – when most considered that the world was unsinkable. Those who were aware and willing could be trained as worthy custodians of the lifeboats. I examined this analogy closely in my Honours thesis *Fred Robinson, Theory and Me* (2005) which focussed on Fred Robinson’s persuasive rhetoric.

<sup>305</sup> On February 20<sup>th</sup> 1962 Perth became known as the ‘City of Lights’ when city residents lit their house lights and streetlights as American astronaut John Glenn passed overhead while orbiting the earth on Friendship 7 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Perth,\\_Western\\_Australia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Perth,_Western_Australia), accessed 15.3.2010).

<sup>306</sup> Some of Jacqueline Parkhurst’s *Open Mind* group came to meet the new generation of *Shalam* arrivals in 1971. Even into the mid-1970s most of the New Age network in Perth was in touch with *Shalam*. While the ‘New Age Council’ never developed as Mary had hoped, *Shalam* had during the ’60s become a common meeting ground for daytime picnic-style activities of general spiritual interest. The Perth Theosophical Society catered for the more formal evening lectures of the *Theosophically-aligned* visitors, while *Shalam* tended to host the more marginal New Age teachers visiting Perth.

Fred and Mary tended to believe most of this sort of ‘evidence’, adding it to their schema and using it to confirm other information that suggested Western Australia and Perth – The ‘City of Light(s)’ – was about to fulfil its ‘Austral Aquarian’ destiny as the birthplace of a New Age colony, as an example to the rest of the world.

## A ‘Living Reality’ Class

In a text entitled ‘THE ORDER OF THE UNIVERSE’ (Mary Robinson, in *Shalam Newsletter*, September 28, 1968), Mary writes of taking action towards a ‘New-Age Spiritual Community’ by ‘teaching and applying the technique of *The Order of the Universe*’ which she believed had been ‘brought forward as an effort to *GROUND THE KINGDOM OF GOD* down onto Earth (“Grounding it” – like earthing electricity)’. Mary goes on to suggest that ‘If a few people can be gathered together who can appreciate and apply this Principle, then they will represent *The Kingdom of God* in this area ...’. By depicting such a group as an ‘*Army of God*’ or a ‘*Company of God*’, Mary went on to make the statement she often made in the Community during the 1970s and 1980s: ‘*God is guiding this Class. I am just the instrument being used to convey this technique by which HE will guide it*’ (ibid.). The idea that Mary was being used as an ‘instrument’ to guide the class is very different from most models of leadership.

Further resonance with the later Universal Brotherhood can be detected in the following, if the word ‘Class’ is replaced with the words ‘Community’ or ‘Brotherhood’:

*This Class is a Living Reality. It is being evolved, step by step. It is a Spiritual Pattern or prototype of the Order of the Universe. If it does not live for you then it is not for you ...’ (Mary Robinson, in *Shalam Newsletter*, September 28, 1968).*

The same idea is expanded to include centres which *harmonised* on a *similar vibration* or *ray*. The November Newsletter describes how Mary saw the functioning of the Light Centres established around the *City of Light* – particularly Parkhurst/Lander group:<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> Jacqueline Lander and Jacqueline Parkhurst were one in the same. While I suspected this, I could not confirm it through any New Age links, a Google search for both names together revealed that Jacqueline Lander-Holms of Western Australia, once used the trading name of Jacqueline Parkhurst ([http://www.ozeyes.com/company70283086008/LANDER\\_HOLMES\\_JACQUELINE](http://www.ozeyes.com/company70283086008/LANDER_HOLMES_JACQUELINE)), accessed 19.9.2011).



*The Landers have bought a block of land a little further along the Range of Hills, towards the north... The set-up is that The New Age Spiritual Community comprises a number of small groupings – SHALAM being one and The Lander Group another, and we work together on a Community relationship. We feel that by so doing we are setting Patterns for the New-Age, or 'The Brotherhood of Man', in which The Seven Rays will function.*<sup>308</sup>

*If enough of these Centres can be established wandering spiritual travellers will find a 'home from home' atmosphere in the one in which he feels himself most suited (Mary Robinson, in Shalam Newsletter, November 13, 1968, p. 1).*

## **Handing on 'The Torch'**

The November 13<sup>th</sup> *Shalam Newsletter* of 1968 begins, 'it is 6 years ago to the day that Mary and I were 'drawn together to establish this "Lighted Landing Field"' (Fred Robinson, p. 1). In the following Fred is musing again about his potential retirement:

*We have laid the Foundations and now I am beginning to relax: It may well be that Mary has some loose ends to tie up, but I am quite happy to hand over all of my responsibilities for this life to some of the young ones coming along who are willing to take up 'THE TORCH' as I put it down (ibid.).*

The Robinsons were clearly relaxing more and were relatively happy with their life at Shalam. Fred had become more domesticated and less intense:

*We have decided to take the day off and have a quiet little celebration. We are going to catch the Ferry Boat & spend the day at Rottnest Island – very similar, in many ways to the trip to Green Island out of Cairns. We are looking forward to the outing very much ... There is a very happy atmosphere at Shalam these days (ibid.).*

The impression is given that the Robinsons are handing over many of their responsibilities to others. A New Zealander, Trevor Redpath, was taking over the orchard and garden and was 'settling in to the "Shalam Vibration" like a long lost son' (ibid.); while the Lander Group had taken over correspondence and printing. 'I am really celebrating my impending retirement from Active Service on the physical level' (ibid.) comments Fred; but retirement was always 'impending', never acted upon for more than a few days.

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<sup>308</sup> The *Seven Rays* concept had been presented by a number of occultists, but it was flying saucer contactee George Hunt Williamson under the pseudonym Brother Philip, who had fired the Robinsons' imagination about this subject in *The Secret of the Andes* (1961) (<http://www.answers.com/topic/george-hunt-williamson>, accessed 8.2.2010). See also footnotes 156, 219, 269.

Interstate and overseas visitors were always coming and going. This newsletter mentions that Violet Beazley, another New Zealander, was about to return home:

*She has become one of us and we are reluctant to let her go. There is quite an intermingling of N.Z. and Aust. Spiritual People these days – we are becoming like one big family. For its size, Perth, The City of Light, is spiritually very promising (Fred Robinson, Shalam Newsletter, November 13, 1968, p. 2).*

## The Earthquake and the Vases

Via a five stanza poem Mary relates the effect of the Earthquake that was felt in Perth in October 1968:<sup>309</sup>

### *The Balancing Vases*

*... Shalam shook from top to toe,  
But not a thing was touched.*

*My Vases, cried I, running to the Altar,  
Surely they'll be down.  
But there they were,  
Standing tall and graceful,  
As they've stood these last five years*

(Mary Robinson, in *Shalam Newsletter*, November 13, 1968, p. 2).

Within this poem, and then in the following text, Mary asks some rhetorical questions that lead into some teaching:

*What happened then,  
That the walls could shake,  
Like one would shake a dusty mat,  
And yet these vases, balancing, top heavy,  
Could still be standing there?*

*Everything in Shalam House  
Was as if there'd never been a 'Quake'*

*Was this an omen? A warning of things to come? Was this a sign of Divine  
Protecting, that can be expected in these troubled days ahead?  
Was it a demonstration of the 91<sup>st</sup> Psalm: 'He that dwelleth in the Secret Place  
of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of The Almighty'?* (Mary  
Robinson, in *Shalam Newsletter*, November 13, 1968, p. 2).

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<sup>309</sup> At 10.59 am on October 14, 1968 a 40 second earthquake, measuring 6.9 on the Richter Scale, destroyed the town of Meckering 130 km east of Perth and was felt over a considerable area of the south western region of Western Australia ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meckering,\\_Western\\_Australia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meckering,_Western_Australia), accessed 9.2.2010).

Mary's ensuing teaching concludes that '*when one walks within the Law ... suffering is transformed and put to good effect*' while '*Needless suffering is no more*' (ibid.). Mary sums up her homily with her favourite prayer about faith – one which was used to conclude literally thousands of daily services in the later UBI Community:

*LET COME WHAT MAY  
TO ME THIS DAY  
MAY I BELIEVE  
ALL I RECEIVE IS SENT IN LOVE  
DOWN FROM ABOVE ?*

(Mary Robinson, in *Shalam Newsletter*, November 13, 1968, p. 2).

Other questions regarding Shalam's ongoing focus with channelled teachings regarding '*The Final Exam*', '*The Evacuation*', and '*The Second Coming of Christ*' are also addressed in this newsletter – and in a question and answer format:

*Q. Why do some Channels lead us to believe that we are on the verge of Evacuation, while others continue to speak of coming events many years ahead?*

*A. It could be that the evacuation is only an incident in the overall Plan. When we come back we will get on with what we were doing when we left, i.e. Establishing the Kingdom of GOD on Earth* (Mary Robinson, in *Shalam Newsletter*, November 13, 1968, p. 3).

Questions surrounding this 'planetary evacuation' engaged Mary for the rest of her life. Fred was more concerned with sharing any prophecy which would encourage his listeners to make snap changes in their thinking and lifestyle: '*There is every urgency but no rush*', was a favourite exhortation until he died.

## **Recognising Ignorance**

*Shalam Newsletter* texts, of the period after Christmas 1967, often reveal a certain sense of awe, recognition of their ignorance, and the uselessness of speculation about the future. When pressed, the Robinsons were always endearingly humbled by the mystery of life. They were not intransigent *know-it-alls*, although their writing and lecturing could give that impression. While they were both still caught up in the imminence of the *Cosmic Plan*, Mary at least was moving away from Fred's insistence on specific outcomes, or following too closely the information coming from particular channels

who insisted on the *end-of-the-world evacuation in the very near future* (a timing that suited Fred's time of life, as well as his prophetic predilections):

*It is readily understandable that our finite minds are not capable of comprehending the vastness of the things to be unfolded for us. The best we can do, from day to day, is to apply what we know and expect a continuous flow of revelation as we are able to receive it. Only when we know how little we know will we be receptive to further knowledge* (Mary Robinson, in *Shalam Newsletter*, November 13, 1968, p. 3).

In hindsight it is clear that the Robinsons would have made a greater contribution to society had they ignored much of the channelling about *the End Times*, and simply focused on their little Community and their faith in God. After the Christmas 1967 non-event, Findhorn completely dropped all specific dates related to the *end of the old order*, embracing the unfolding of the New Age via their Community-living experiment. Shalam, and then the Universal Brotherhood, suffered under the weight of the Robinsons' old *channellised* thinking about the New Age and the extremely 'out there' proposition of *a mass cosmic lift off*. Few of my generation were intuitively drawn to such ideas as a *planetary evacuation*, the *imminent return of the Christ* or the *final exams*. We simply wanted to live the spiritual truths we were learning, on a practical day-to-day level.

Other Robinson injunctions such as '*Practicalise the Spiritual, and Spiritualise the Commercial*', and '*We are not here to combat the negative, but to establish the positive*' made much more sense. Extra-terrestrial intervention didn't feel like it was going to happen – not to me and not to most of the Members – however it seemed to us that it was not our role to convince the Robinsons to the contrary. For these reasons many of us just let these concepts go through to the keeper. As at Findhorn, my generation was more drawn to bringing in the New Age as a positive way of life.

In the solitary second page of an undated newsletter of this period Mary attempts to make overarching sense of the diversity of messages they had been receiving. She first quotes *Orthon*, and then recalls a personal story designed to underscore the importance of 'experience' when trying to comprehend the *utterly incredible truths* and the almost incomprehensible changes that she and Fred believed mankind were soon to experience:

*Each Channel has a different aspect of the Plan to convey to us. ORTHON sais [sic] in "Voice from Heaven" 3–12, "Even if you use your whole imagination it will not suffice in regard to what you may expect". It is readily understandable that our finite minds are not capable of comprehending the vastness of the things to be unfolded for us...*

*I once took a Native Girl for her first visit to the Sea. I tried to prepare her for it and she gladly came with me; but, one look at the vast ocean of water, as we topped the sand-hill she stood rooted to the ground, terrified, then turned and bolted in the opposite direction. Some things have to be experienced to be understood, they cannot be explained. I suppose this is why we are told not to speculate – enough for us to follow the Master's Voice and follow where HE leads (Mary Robinson, in *Shalam Newsletter*, circa late 1968, early 1969).*

## **Lecturing in Country Western Australia**

Despite the post–1967 return to the practical elements of their New Age project, other aspects of the Robinsonian message continued. During July 1969 the Robinsons made a trip north into country Western Australia. An 850 word article in *The Geraldton Guardian*: 'They Believe in Space Life' reveals their motivations for the trip and the media's attitude:

"It was only recently as a result of increased sighting of flying objects that people in Western Australia have become interested in these things and make our

mission possible and necessary," Mr Robinson said (*The Geraldton Guardian*, n.d.).

A sub-heading, 'ETHEREAL', describes the Robinsons as 'a remarkable couple, extremely frail, almost ethereal in their thinness and white hair ...' (ibid.). Mary is described as '...very chic in a red trouser suit set off by a long gold-and-bead necklace and matching shoes' (ibid.). Their mode of travel, their plans and their attitude to sceptics are explored:

Husband and wife drive a Volkswagen Kombi on their lecture tours. This is the first time they have come north of Perth and after Geraldton they will head for Carnarvon. In Geraldton they have lectured to the Tree Society and are scheduled to give a public talk at the Civic Centre on Sunday.

"We invite the public to attend this meeting and we hope the sceptics will ask as many questions as possible." Mr Robinson said ...

"If they don't believe, that's their affair. We don't hope to gain anything by all this ... we're just passing on a message" (ibid.).

The Robinsons ran their whole enterprise from the Old Age Pension (as it was then called) and the love offerings of supporters. Without marketing or set-price seminars, they simply passed on the unusual information (*Truth*) which they believed was vital – and in a wide range of domains. The UFOs were the drawcard to their talks, and inevitably the main issue covered by journalists. A reporter just had to quote what the Robinsons said to give their readers something outrageous. There was no need to fabricate or distort interviews to reveal outrageous claims – the Robinsons obligingly did that themselves. They were happy to see their *truths* publicised, even if they themselves were laughed at; and so it is quite likely they would have been quite happy with the introduction to this article:

The world is coming to an end and the only hope for the survival of humanity as we know it is to cultivate the friendship of creatures from outer space and evacuate the earth. That, in essence, is the message that an elderly couple who believe they have

contact with outer space beings are conveying to earth people in the course of a lecture tour of Western Australia, which has bought them to Geraldton (*The Geraldton Guardian*, n.d.).

Occasionally in this article, as in even the most positive articles about the Robinsons, the journalist (unknown in this case) uses a descriptor which intimates that the interviewee had stepped beyond the interviewer's wildest imaginings:

"There are flying objects as big as planets," Mrs. Robinson said earnestly. "Most of those seen are small ones and

several people have gone on flights in them. These are authenticated cases" (ibid.).

## Answering Important Questions

Returning to Perth in early August 1969 the Robinsons were soon writing again.<sup>310</sup>

### *Dear Friends of the New-Age,*

*Please forgive the delay in sending you the enclosed literature [just what was sent cannot be traced]. It is just over a week since we arrived home & we have been busily engaged in catching up with many things. A number of questions keep popping up, so we will endeavour to answer them briefly in these News-Letters. Your further questions will be answered in like manner (Mary Robinson, in Shalam Newsletter, August 12, 1969, p. 1).*

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<sup>310</sup> The Christmas 1967 edition is the last extant edition of *Shalam Light*. Fred's comments about the Lander Group taking over correspondence and printing, led me to the conclusion that the Robinsons ceased publishing *Shalam Light* at that time, using *Shalam Newsletters* to accompany literature they continued to reprint and send out to their readership.

The degree to which the Robinsons were tuned into the political, ecological, economic, agricultural and dietary issues of the day is remarkable, considering their publicity was so focussed on UFOs and the religious and spiritual themes of the New Age. The Robinsons were ‘acting locally’ and ‘sustainably’ while ‘thinking globally’ and ‘holistically’ well before such terms became popular in the 1980s and ’90s.<sup>311</sup> Excerpts from some of these long and wide-ranging newsletters reveal the diversity of subjects which the Robinsons seriously investigated.

While never pretending to be either intellectual or academic, they researched many issues from their cosmic (to them holistic) perspective. They did think for themselves, even though it may appear that the cosmic channelling they were absorbing was dictating their positions. In their own minds they were discriminating editors. I remember Fred telling me that they had been sent some articles which even stretched his *open and receptive mind*. What the Robinsons chose to leave out of their *Shalam Lights* and *Shalam Newsletters* is of course impossible to trace. Their answers to readers’ questions are however instructive regarding their New Age mindset about important issues of the day:

### **On Student Unrest**

The Harvard student rebellion of April 9, 1969 caused many to ask the question ‘Why?’ The Robinsons had a cosmic view about such rebelliousness:

***Q. What is the cause of Student unrest?***

***A. As we understand the situation, there has been an influx of intellectually advanced souls. (Prof. Messel, of Sydney Uni. stated some years ago that “it seems as tho’ a race of young Einsteins have been born onto our Planet).<sup>312</sup> This is one part of the Cosmic Plan to throw Light onto the absurdities of our modern so-called civilisation, with the objective of preparing The Way for the Builders of The New Order who are now being born. Thus we see the old values giving way to the new. A conflict of Change verses resistance to change is causing confusion, but out of the chaos will come Order for this cosmic operation is under a Higher Control than what appears on the surface (Shalam Newsletter, August 12, 1969, p. 1).***

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<sup>311</sup> The general principle of ‘holism’ was concisely summarised by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics*: ‘The whole is more than the sum of its parts’ (1045a 10; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holism>, accessed 10.2.2010).

<sup>312</sup> Harry Messel (1922) is a retired Australian physicist and educator. The Professor Harry Messel International Science School (ISS) is the flagship of the Science Foundation for Physics, with a forty-five-year history and a reputation as the best program of its kind in the world (<http://www.physics.usyd.edu.au/foundation/iss/iss.shtml>, accessed 14.12.2010).

## On Science

Science was a subject on which Fred Robinson (in particular) had a lot to say. He particularly liked to quote scientists like Albert Einstein and Harry Messel. Here Fred and Mary Robinson, who had collaborated on this project, share their own typology of scientists:

*Science plays a big part in the lives of all of us in these 'Latter Days'. We have divided scientists into 4 broad categories:*

- (1) The Spiritual Scientist who KNOWS that there is a GOD maintaining ORDER in the Omniverse*
- (2) The Religious Scientist who believes & hopes that there IS a just and loving Father.*
- (3) The Agnostic Scientist who does not know & has little if any hope.*
- (4) And, finally, the materialistic scientist who believes that if there ever was a God then surely he must be dead.*

*... In the main it is the latter class who are responsible for the creation of such chemical monstrosities as Thalidomide – with its attendant horrors for the children; and D.D.T. and all of the synthetic poisons which have followed in its wake ...*

*Now it is being openly admitted, by those qualified to judge, that in a few short years ... our once beautifully Balanced Planet will be as uninhabitable as the surface of the Moon.*

*What the Spiritual Scientist KNEW when this perversion of Nature's Laws began was ignored because their statements of Truth on the matter were subjective and no objective proof could be offered. Now they have all the objective proof anyone could desire but what are those in the seat of authority going to do about it? ... (Fred & Mary Robinson, in *Shalam Newsletter*, March 24, 1971, p. 1).*

## On Ecology and Krishnamurti

Ecologically, Fred Robinson was 50 years ahead of his time. He championed Rachael Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) and Paul Erlich's *Population Bomb* (1968) propositions. In this 1971 newsletter Fred advertises a \$1 U.S. post-paid pamphlet, *How to Kill a Beautiful World*, by Gertrude Milton Walcher (1970):<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> The following excerpt of her booklet reveals why it appealed to Fred so much:

This thesis is written because of the righteous indignation, anger and frustration of a subjective pioneer in a world obsessed by objectivity and materialism ... It was a beautiful world when the laws of God and nature were revered. Now it seems there is nothing sacred' (Walcher 1970, in Theodore Seienberg's *The Unnatural History of Natural Disaster in America* 2000, p.147, see also endnote 69).



*She has what we think is a wonderful Gift. She can speak to the top world scientists in their own language in a manner that is intelligible to the ordinary citizen of average intelligence. This is all part of the New Aquarian approach to life's problems. An atmosphere of understanding opens confidence where all the cards are laid on the table and there are NO SECRETS (Fred Robinson, in Shalam Newsletter, March 24, 1971, p. 2).*

Fred's writing is identifiable by its constant use of allusions – ones that work simply because for him everything is inevitably connected with everything else. He used cryptic segues in his speaking too, lurching from topic to topic via the faintest connection with what was just said. In this case to Krishnamurti:

*Our present materialistic, militaristic political economy is Top Secret because the policies behind it are NOT GODS's Policies and they will not stand up to the Light of Day. Krishnamurti put his finger right on the spot 50 years ago when he said 'TRUTH is the enemy of society' (ibid.).*

### **On the History of the Commonwealth Bank**

This March 1971 *Shalam Newsletter* tackled a raft of issues such as democracy and the mass medication of the public water supplies (Fluoridation); imminent national bankruptcy and detailed reasons for the introduction of 'ample interest-free Bank Credit' (ibid.) which could be made available through the Commonwealth Bank

*... to finance all public works, National Housing schemes etc. etc. (including, of course, ample overdrafts to all Primary producers with a token interest charge to cover costs of administration – say half a percent per annum) (ibid.).*

This was followed by some early history of the Commonwealth Bank:

*The first Governor of The Commonwealth Bank, Sir Denis Millar, advanced an interest free loan of 300 million pounds to the Federal Government to enable them to build the Trans Continental Railway. This is how ALL National undertakings should be financed & this was the original purpose behind founding the Commonwealth Bank – The Bank of the Wealth Producers of Australia – The People (Fred Robinson, Shalam Newsletter, March 1971, p. 2).*

Fred detailed how the act was altered in 1924 by the Bruce-Page Government, suggesting it was persuaded by 'vested interests' (ibid.). Fred goes on to recommend the wording for a Referendum on the question:

*"ARE YOU IN FAVOUR OF THE ISSUE OF INTEREST FREE BANK CREDIT TO THE GOVERNMENT TO THE FULL EXTENT NEEDED TO DISTRIBUTE TO THE CONSUMERS THE ANNUAL WEALTH THE PEOPLE OF AUSTRALIA PRODUCE?" (Always remembering that the purpose of Production is Consumption by ALL members of the Australian Nation) (ibid.).*

Fred concludes this newsletter with the need for immediate action – something he knew would not be forthcoming.

*If men, in the past, have passed a law to prevent this being done, then an informed Public Opinion can compel the repeal of such laws for the benefit of a small minority and substitute a LAW which will benefit the WHOLE NATION – Producers, Distributors & Consumers. Time for Right Action presses hard on our heels.*

*Love and Blessings from SHALAM and Fred and Mary* (Fred Robinson, in *Shalam Newsletter*, March 1971, p. 2).

For Fred, the logic behind Douglas Social Credit theories was simple and self-evident. Fred's thinking however closely mirrored that of the much vilified Eric D. Butler, who had founded the League of Rights in 1946. While Fred empathised with many of Butler's economic views, there were major differences between their positions. Both were active in the Social Credit Movement in the 1930s.<sup>314</sup> Mary however was adamant that there be no association between Shalam and Butler's League of Rights. I remember seeing an advertisement in the local press in Perth in 1972, and knowing nothing about them I asked Mary about this League of Rights. 'I wouldn't touch them with a barge pole' was her immediate reply. Fred believed that banks should be the servants of the community. He often quoted his version of a biblical injunction: *Thou shalt not charge thy brother usury - interest.*<sup>315</sup> This was a message well suited to my generation, who were ready to join Fred in condemning the banks and all multinationals as enemies of society.

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<sup>314</sup> By 1968, the National Director of the Australian League of Rights, Eric Dudley Butler, had been active in politics for just over 30 years. Rightly or wrongly, he and the League were widely considered to be anti-Semitic, racist and possibly even pro-Nazi. They were equally well known for their adherence to an economic theory, Social Credit, that had long been dismissed by mainstream economists and the major political parties (including the Country Party) as crankish and impractical (<http://www.jcu.edu.au/aff/history/articles/greaseon.htm>, accessed 12.2.2010).

<sup>315</sup> Fred is quoting the Bible here: 'Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of anything that is lent upon usury' (Deuteronomy 23:19 KJV). See Chapter 5 Part 2 'The Social Credit Movement'.

## Guru Fred

Since the Beatles met Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in August 1967, my generation had been looking to the East for spiritual sustenance. The press was beginning to make the link between Fred and Indian gurus. Pippa Johnson, in the 'People' section of Perth's *The Daily News* (5.9.1969) wrote an article entitled 'His Armadale Home "Disciples" Centre' (p. 14) which makes a direct connection between an Eastern guru and Fred: 'India has the Maharishi and Perth has Fred Robinson' (ibid.). With Fred still wearing the respectable suit and tie, some distinctions had to be made:

Though Mr. Robinson's appearance is not as bizarre as the Maharishi, his pink scrubbed cheeks, piercing blue eyes, white wispy beard and white hair give him a suitably mystical aura. "I guess you could say I practise a Western version of the Yogi's philosophy," said Mr. Robinson.

His home in Armadale is a centre for "disciples" of meditation, cleansing of the mind, body and soul – and flying saucer believers. "It is a voluntary service" said his grey-headed wife Mary, smart in a scarlet trouser suit and dangling gold chains (Johnson 1969 p. 14).

After a description of the property, their organic gardening practices and diet, reference is made to their recent lecture tour to Geraldton and Carnarvon on the scientific subject of flying saucers:

He thinks more scientists should have the courage to delve into this subject. "There are two types of scientists," he said. "Those dedicated to the research for the truth and those simply doing it for a living." Mr. Robinson is very excited about a pamphlet he has, publishing a talk by Silas Newton, geologist, geophysicist, magnetic

scientist and world authority on spacecraft. "Mr Newton is interested in the propulsion of flying saucers," said Mr Robinson. "He believes they are magnetically propelled." (Johnston, *The Daily News*, September 5, 1969, p. 14).

Fred was so steeped in *Ufology* that he assumed journalists would (or should) know about the key personnel involved. Unfortunately Fred did not know enough about some of the people he named as experts in the field – people like Silas Newton.<sup>316</sup> The name

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<sup>316</sup> Silas Mason Newton was the main sources of information for Frank Scully's story of a crashed UFO near the town of Aztec in March 1948, and published in his best-selling book, *Behind the Flying Saucers* (1950). The controversial story suggested that 34 alien bodies were studied under the utmost secrecy in various defence establishments in the United States. Silas Newton has attracted his own fair share of controversy. While he may have been a geologist he was also a convicted and known con-man ([http://www.forteantimes.com/features/articles/161/incident\\_at\\_aztec.html](http://www.forteantimes.com/features/articles/161/incident_at_aztec.html), accessed 11.2.2010).

Silas Newton was used as a bona fide scientist who corroborated the facts Fred was sharing. The Internet (particularly Wikipedia) has made it possible to immediately find many of these sources, which less than a decade ago were very hard to find. Even now however, the claims and counter-claims of those with entrenched positions, from *true-believer* to *arch-sceptic*, make research difficult. This was further complicated in the 1960s and '70s by the Robinsons' own positioning, which saw objective and academically produced research as part of the hegemony of deception in an overarching world-wide conspiracy against 'the truth' – always seen as 'the enemy of society'. For the Robinsons, materialistic science was anathema: the cause of many of the world's problems. Conversely however, the Robinsons were far too trusting of their own sources, and were themselves the gullible believers of too many outrageous stories and untenable positions – positions then passed on to the also gullible New Age Seekers of the 1970s, some of whom became members of the Universal Brotherhood Community.

## **Out of Retirement**

Early in 1970 Fred was invited by one of the organisers to attend a youth rock festival at Ourimbah. Billed as the 'Pilgrimage for Pop' the event was Australia's first large-scale outdoor rock festival. Held on the Australia Day long weekend of 1970 (24–27 January), the venue was a private farm at Ourimbah, near Gosford, on the NSW central coast, north of Sydney. Ourimbah was a unique event in many respects. Staged only months after the epochal Woodstock Festival in the USA, it is particularly significant for being the first local rock festival with an all-Australian line-up. It was compared by Adrian Rawlins and featured Billy Thorpe and the Aztecs making a 'comeback'. It was rumoured that John Lennon and Yoko Ono would be there too, but they only received their invitation the day it started. The promoters were well aware of establishment anxiety about such gatherings and they were at pains to stress that this was very much a test case for the 'young generation'. Pop columnists emphasised the need for festival patrons to be well-behaved if such events were to be allowed to continue. There were no serious incidents (<http://www.milesago.com/Festivals/ourimbah.htm>, accessed 21.8.2011). The following reflection captures the mood and vernacular of the day:

About 5000 hippies, freaks and music fanatics crossed enemy territory by thumb or wheels ... There seemed so few of us; the mass assemblage that we had all hoped for didn't happen and with over 90 police surveilling the scene, it left us all feeling vulnerable & exposed while we munched on homemade vege-burgers and tried to dig the scene as much as we could, lacking the anonymity of numbers. Any girl daring to go topless would immediately hear the sounds of the press cameras clicking at their scoop for the Sunday papers.

([http://blogs.smh.com.au/noisepollution/archives/2008/02/we\\_were\\_stardust\\_we\\_were\\_golde.html](http://blogs.smh.com.au/noisepollution/archives/2008/02/we_were_stardust_we_were_golde.html), accessed 31.8.2011).

Fred's appearance at Ourimbah, being before his wider public appeal, has slipped under the radar of the cultural history of this event. However it was here that Fred met and began mentoring Billy Thorpe, encouraging him to fast occasionally. The occasion was later noted by *GO-SET* youth/music magazine which mentions that Fred spoke to 'a receptive crowd of freaks who attended the recent Ourimbah free festival' (MacLean 1971, p. 9). Melbourne's *The Sunday Independent* also recalled that 'Fred Robinson first attracted a "pop" following at a NSW teenage festival two years ago' (14.11.1971, p. 14). Another remembrance reveals the value of reflective blogs in piecing together history:

I remember, ZOOMA, TERRY, KENNY, THE PROFESSOR, FRED, RAH, THE BLIND BEGGAR, CHRIS (land owner) ... about 40 were there when I arrived and this grew to about 60 that was the main crew that put it all together (comment by Danny Harris August 17, 2009 posted on [http://blogs.smh.com.au/noisepollution/archives/2008/02/we\\_were\\_stardust\\_we\\_were\\_golde.html?page=2#comments](http://blogs.smh.com.au/noisepollution/archives/2008/02/we_were_stardust_we_were_golde.html?page=2#comments), accessed 31.8.2011).

Fred's philosophical footprint at this rock festival is all but lost, revealing that he was little more than an uncomfortable curio. He told me that he found 'a few responsible young people' who were interested, but that he 'felt like a fish out of water in the mixed vibrations' (pers. comm., 1971).

Fred was beginning to find those younger people who appreciated what he had to say and the actions he recommended. By the end of the following year he had contacted many thousands of *Australian Aquarians*. In a long newsletter to Shalam's readership dated the 20<sup>th</sup> of December 1971, Fred outlined the history of a trip he had just made, during which he captured the attention of a sector of the youth – of which I was one. While the full history of this trip is beyond the scope of this thesis, why he went, how it began, and what happened prior to my meeting him in Sydney is relevant:

*You will remember that I told you that Mary's 59<sup>th</sup> Birthday occurred on June the 25<sup>th</sup> – exactly three and half years after the never-to-be-forgotten Xmas Day 1967. She was given a vision that night that another Tour of Investigation of the Eastern States was necessary to meet the needs of the questing Youth and fill in the gaps in their Understanding & Information on the needs of these critical Times of the End and their role in the ever unfolding drama of the Ages – But, the indication was given that at this time I must go alone.*

*And so, after much discussion of the pro's & con's, on July the 5<sup>th</sup> I left Perth with a return rail ticket to Atherton N.Q. and I arrived in Kuranda 6 days later. There, at the home of our old friends James and Ida Beck I spent two months recuperating, investigating and preparing myself for this final attempt to convey an UNDERSTANDING of the NEEDS of these crucial 'Latter Days'... (Fred Robinson, in Shalam Newsletter, December 20, 1971, p.1).*

In this letter Fred comments that there were '*Many fine young people contacted*' who could '*pioneer the laying of the Foundation of the Alternative society*' but that they were '*greatly handicapped by lack of finance,*' and that

*the greatest problem was posed by the admixture of immature, irresponsible souls with those responsible young people who were sincere in their attempt to establish a Way of Life founded on Love & Truth (ibid.).*

Giving a detailed example of such immaturity, Fred recounts at some length the story of the burning down of Jan Daube's house by '*one of these immature souls*' (ibid.). Jan Daube had been a friend of Fred's in the 1950s. He was a music teacher. Having alternative leanings Daube had helped some young people to establish a Community on his property. Together with the founders he drew up a basic code of behaviour that precluded drug taking. One of those admitted broke this rule:

*When it was pointed out to him that he had agreed to abide by the rules of conduct, agreed to by the Founders of the Group, he flew into a maniacal rage and burnt two houses to the ground along with a Grand Piano, and an upright one, and a beautiful solar heater (ibid., pp. 1–2).*

Despite such admonitory exemplars, Fred and Mary were both resolved on carrying their message to the next generation.

## Preparing for a Breakthrough

Fred can be seen as equipping himself with a message tailored to youth, one which included responsibility, discrimination, maturity and selfless service:

*DISCRIMINATION is a Key Word – as is Understanding, Compassion & all of the positive qualities of the mature, responsible New-Age Soul. Vibrations cannot be mixed, any more than we can mix oil & water...*

*Having gathered together all of the relevant facts relating to the existing situation the long return trip to Perth started in early September. A fortnight was spent at the New Age Centre at 398, Milton Road, Auchenflower, Brisbane. Noel Parsons had kindly offered to organise meetings with various New-Age Groups & and make contact with the news media....*

*It was during this short stay in my old home town (which had rejected this Message in years gone by) that I got the first indication that the Young People were going to recognise this Message ... I foresaw that, sooner or later there would be a Breakthrough with a Publicity explosion of the first magnitude.*

*By mid September I had arrived in Sydney – the so-called ‘Sink of Iniquity’ (and truly enough I could walk from one end of George St. to the other and never see one truly healthy, happy looking person). Almost immediately I was led into the open arms of Stephen Carthew (Fred Robinson, in *Shalam Newsletter*, December 20, 1971, p. 2).*

Fred returned to Perth with an eager entourage of happy New Age Seekers. The last paragraph of Fred and Mary’s 1971 Christmas newsletter to their *Shalam* readership proves how much trust Fred had in the young people he had been *catalysing* – and how quickly we appreciated his largely subjective ‘*Facts of Life*’ and his mind-boggling ‘*Cosmic Viewpoint*’:

*After all these long years of frustration trying to get *The Facts of Life* into the consciousness of the older generation, with a lamentable lack of success, it is a wonderful feeling we get when these eager mature young people see the need of the moment & step into the breach and take over.*

*So also in presenting the *Cosmic Viewpoint* to them a very big % of them have further developed their spiritual perspectives to the point where they can unerringly sift the true from the false & no longer have to wait long years before they get their conviction by objective proof. It is a most exhilarating experience to discuss the wonderful future with this very happy band of working investigators ...*

*Who join with us in sending*

*Love and Blessings from*

*‘Shalam’ & Fred and Mary ... (Fred Robinson, in *Shalam Newsletter*, December 20, 1971, p.1).*

To explore the lives of the New Agers, the generation the Robinsons had been waiting for, I sketch my own life and some more detailed experiences surrounding my meeting Fred Robinson in late 1971. Even a brief history reveals how the same networking of influences can be seen at work in the next generation of founders and members of the later Universal Brotherhood Community.



## **Section IV: Publicity, Perception and Legacy**

### **Chapter 12: Managing Fred Robinson**

I too was part of the UBI Robinsonian *before-story*. Whether I like it or not, I was a co-founder of the Universal Brotherhood. While a detailed autobiography would reveal some of my own traits which affected the later UBI, such an undertaking is beyond the scope of this study. Part 1 of this chapter begins then with a thumbnail sketch of my life up till meeting Fred Robinson, and expands into a more detailed account of the period from the day I met him until the first Community group went to Carranya. This part of the pre-history of the UBI aids understanding of how a segment of Australia's baby-boomers 'discovered' Fred Robinson, and become organised enough to start a new religious movement. Some unusual aspects of his teachings are also broached here.

Part 2, an account of the press coverage during this early period of publicising Fred Robinson, shows how these early articles formed the public perception of Fred Robinson's propositions, colouring the way the 'Fred Robinson' group would be seen, but also capturing many of the New Age tropes deflecting and displacing the earlier 'channelled' apocalyptic visions and so recruiting a number of my generation to the cause.

#### **Part 1: Life before the Robinsons**

My father was a successful businessman in Melbourne, before being a POW in Changi, Singapore and on the Burma Railway. My mother was a beautiful and cultured Jewess, a frustrated actor, but an accomplished social entertainer. They had both been considerably changed by the War, but married anyway, and I was born in 1947 – a baby-boomer. After four years of living in England during the time of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, our family returned to Sydney where my father managed a large department store. We lived in the leafy Northern Suburbs, across the road from the private school I and my brother attended. My parents divorced when I was fifteen and I and my brother attended boarding school. I followed a theatrical tradition in my mother's side of family by becoming a filmmaker – specialising in editing.

At twenty-one, like so many of my age cohort, I travelled in Asia and Europe for two years ‘to experience life’ and work on films. I was to meet a wide cross section of people in India, as well as many young European and American travellers with whom I smoked marijuana and hashish – but I also connected with a number of spiritual groups. During this two year period I edited two feature films, one in Madras (Chennai) and the other in London, where I mixed and worked with an irreligious group of Australian expat filmmakers. In many ways this set of experiences was typical of the middle-class trajectory of the day – but what happened next was not.

Returning to Australia in 1970, my work as a freelance filmmaker was interspersed with a growing interest in organic gardening that started when I rented ‘Pine Grove’, an old home with a large garden at Bayview a Northern Beaches outer suburb of Sydney. Through a number of spiritual mentors who always seemed to appear at the right moment, I gradually came to see Pine Grove as a centre from which organic gardening and New Age ideas could be discussed and ‘lived’. I had discovered the dietary benefits of wheat grass and alfalfa sprouts, and was telling people about them. Donald Groom, the Australian Secretary of the Society of Friends (Quakers) had become my most influential mentor. He connected me with Anthony Brooke, founder of the New Age group called ‘The Universal Foundation’ operating at the Findhorn Community in Scotland at that time. Pine Grove soon became the Australian Chapter of The Universal Foundation. I corresponded with Peter Caddy, one of the co-founders of Findhorn, and quickly became connected with the international New Age initiators of the period.

Caddy sent me a reel-to-reel tape of David Spangler’s transmissions from ‘Limitless Love and Truth’ along with the transcripts – with strict instructions not to release them in any public forum. I studied these, along with a pamphlet from the Universal Foundation titled ‘Attunement’, which had been sent to me by Anthony Brooke. While these texts were hard to grasp as knowledge or even understandings, they seemed to me to point to a personal and community-invoked ‘higher consciousness’. The idea that my house and its garden ‘Pine Grove’ could become a centre of spiritual service began to grow in me, while I also consciously linked up with other New Agers in Sydney. I was absorbing the terms and concepts I was reading. I began to attune to the idea that world

transformation was imminent, if only more people could tune into, absorb and work with the New Age energies pouring onto our planet through stepping up of intensified Aquarian cosmic vibrations – whatever they were. I was also excited about the opportunity I had been given to play some part in this unfoldment – whatever it might be. I felt ready and waiting to be used as a vehicle for planetary service – whatever might have been suggested. In short I was ready – even if unprepared – to play a part in God’s Plan for the New Age in Australia. Fred Robinson was on the way to Pine Grove to make some suggestions.

## **Linking with Fred**

A mutual friend of Pine Grove and of Findhorn was in Cairns on holidays when he met Fred Robinson. He wrote to me saying: ‘Fred talks about the whole cosmic thing including UFOs – you will like him. I told him to look you up and go and stay with you’. I was unimpressed with the flying saucers and ambivalent about Fred staying with me, but my friend had already given him my phone number. At the same time Fred and Mary had received a letter from Caddy, telling them about Pine Grove and giving them my contact details. I also got a letter from Peter Caddy telling me that Fred Robinson, an eighty-year old New Age prophet, would be looking me up. I was wary. I had not been interested in the UFO phenomena and did not like ‘prophecy’, especially of the ‘religious’ kind – as distinct from ‘futurism’ of a ‘spiritual’ kind. ‘The Network’ however was already busy. My small movement was about to intersect with another.

In mid-September 1971 Fred Robinson arrived in Sydney, where he stayed the first night with his old friend Hans Delmar, who had been importing and distributing *Oahspe* books in Australia for many years. On the day Fred rang me, a camera crew from ABCs TV’s *Four Corners* was due to film at Pine Grove. They were making a documentary about a ‘new breed’ of organic farmers who were living in small Communities. A friend from my film days had put them in touch with me, and I was assisting the director by putting him onto others whom I had come to know in the organic food network around Sydney. I was in a quandary. I had said to myself, ‘When this Fred guy rings I will not invite him to stay at Pine Grove, but I will invite him over for a visit and check him out’. Peter Caddy had seemed a little ambivalent about him, while encouraging me to

‘make the link’. When Fred rang there were only ninety minutes before the camera crew were to arrive. I told him what was happening.

Fred’s manner of speaking, even during this first phone call, was intoxicating: ‘I think you’re the man I have been looking for’. I got goose-bumps on my arms, and I could feel the hairs on the back of my neck lift. It was easy to believe that it was ‘meant to be’. Perhaps he was who I was looking for, too. I answered, ‘Why don’t you get your gear ready and I will pick you up in an hour and you can come back here and be in the film ... and then stay on at Pine Grove for a while’.

I was already following the New Age idea that *everything happens for a purpose* and in *perfect timing*. I followed my intuition – just as Peter Caddy had recommended as the *modus operandi* at Findhorn (Caddy 1996). Hans Delmar’s place was on the other side of town. When I arrived Fred was standing on the pavement waiting for me. As I parked, Fred put his ‘portmanteau’ (as he called his suitcase) into the back of my Morris Minor Utility and opened the passenger door. As I turned off the engine he said, ‘You have an appointment to keep. Hans here understands that we must be about our Father’s Business. So let’s not waste a minute of God’s precious time’. I was astounded by the thirty second turnaround. Fred Robinson was certainly not into social niceties.

On the way back home I warmed to Fred. We had friends in common: Peter Caddy and Anthony Brooke from Findhorn, and my friend who was still in Northern Queensland. There were other New Age groups we had both ‘linked-with’. Fred may have had no plans – ‘I go about doing the Father’s business as it unfolds’ – but the direction somehow still seemed clear. I was *attuning* to him.

When we arrived back at Pine Grove the crew had arrived and unpacked the film gear. The American director, Mike Young, walked straight up to Fred and gave him a big hug: ‘I wanted you in this film, but you were not at Shalam! Mary said you were travelling. I should have known *you* would find *me*’. Mike and his wife Dianne lived in Perth and had visited Fred and Mary at Shalam on a number of occasions. Fred was as cool as a cosmic cucumber: ‘There is no such thing as a coincidence. It has all been arranged perfectly’. Fred was in his element. Overnight I became Fred’s press agent, friend and student; his ally in *The Work* of *Building the New*.

## The New Age Senior Statesman

To some degree the ‘perfect fit’ Fred achieved with the New Age moment was produced in his response to new-found media attention. Fred Robinson became a validating ‘senior statesman’ of social change through media reports about his teachings. A few days before I first met Fred Robinson an article in *The Australian* entitled ‘A Sage in Search of a Happy Commune’ (8.9.1971, p.1) reported that: ‘Eighty-year-old Fred Robinson left his Perth home nine weeks ago to search for mature hippies and happy communes’ (ibid.). The report revealed that while Fred ‘had not found one well-established and successful commune among the four he visited at Kuranda, near Cairns and on the Atherton Tablelands’, he was about to leave for Byron Bay, ‘where he believes a new commune is to be established soon’. The article quoted Fred as having met ‘many fine young people filled with the spirit of doing the right thing’. He went on to qualify this by saying: ‘but many were also a very mixed-up young bunch’. The conclusion of this article was perhaps the most important part for his younger readers of the time (and the most revealing when examined today), for it shows how Fred was doing his own research, using his own unorthodox methods of making personal contact:

Fred Robinson will continue his search for a happy commune in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia until Christmas. He will live in the communes and discuss the values of the alternative society and the beliefs of a religion called

Shalam, of which he and his wife are the only two participants in Australia (*The Australian*, 8.9.1971, p.1).

Fred was no armchair philosopher. By appreciating the motives of the young people he visited, sharing his experiences with them, he endeared himself to his target audience. It was Fred’s *mix-with-them* approach that impressed the hippies he now sought to *catalyse*. The countercultural dimensions of the Robinsons’ act of simultaneously ‘dropping out’ and yet socially engaging with futures-directed social experimentation perfectly matched the vibe of the day. Here was an 80 year-old-man, ‘cashing in his pension cheques on a \$153 second class return ticket to Cairns’ (ibid.), to undertake a spiritual “road trip” – a theme which by the 1970s had broadened from the Kerouac and

Kesey<sup>317</sup> inspired urban-alienation of the beatnik and “angry young men” imports from the US and UK,<sup>318</sup> to centre first in the draft-evasion tactics of the anti-Vietnam War movement, and then in the anti-corporation, anti-family, anti-suburban, ‘free love’ experimentation of the shift towards left-wing politics and social reform in the 1960s.

Fred’s latest pilgrimage underlined the credibility he had already begun to establish with younger Australians, who were now welcoming him, identifying with him, and listening to what he was saying. This was so despite his warnings about drugs and free-sex and his insistence on a healthy life-style. Fred openly identified with the disaffected: ‘I am a hippie of my generation and I want to act as a signpost to help young people in communes where ever they are’ (Fred Robinson, in *The Australian*, 8.9.1971, p. 1).

For a time in the early 1970s Fred was moving beyond any vulnerability in relation to media representations of his own beliefs and practices – and probably even his semi-lurid “past”, for all Mary’s worries. For the young alienated countercultural protestors, and the young adventurous cosmic idealists, both intent on cutting their futures away from the trodden paths of family life and a salaried existence, not only was all experimentation positive; media denunciations – long established as the favoured technique when it came to youth behaviours – were to be read “against the grain”, almost as evidence of independent thinking and real commitment to the alternative. Fred, openly proud to be part of the new ‘hippie commune’ developments; happy to stand with them; prepared and even willing to be ridiculed and criticised by those unable to comprehend change, was rapidly established as a champion of these ‘fine young people filled with the spirit of doing the right thing’ (Fred Robinson, in *The Australian*, 8.9.1971, p. 1).

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<sup>317</sup> Jean-Louis ‘Jack’ Kerouac (1922–1969) was an American novelist and poet considered a literary iconoclast and a pioneer of the Beat Generation. Kerouac is recognised for his spontaneous method of writing covering topics such as jazz, promiscuity, Buddhism, drugs, poverty, and travel ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack\\_Kerouac](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_Kerouac), accessed 24.10.2010).

Kenneth E. ‘Ken’ Kesey (1935 –2001) was an American author best known for his novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1962), and as a countercultural figure who considered himself a link between the Beat Generation of the 1950s and the hippies of the 1960s. ‘I was too young to be a beatnik, and too old to be a hippie,’ Kesey said in 1999 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ken\\_Kesey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ken_Kesey), accessed 24.10. 2010).

<sup>318</sup> The Beat Generation works highlighted spontaneity, open emotion, visceral engagement in often gritty worldly experiences and yet, the Beats often emphasised a spiritual yearning, using concepts and imagery from Buddhism, Judaism, Catholicism. During the 1960s the Beat culture underwent a transformation and turned into the counterculture of the 1960s, with a change in popular terminology from ‘beatnik’ to ‘hippie’ ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beat\\_Generation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beat_Generation), accessed 24.10.2010).

Ours was the generation Fred Robinson had been waiting for – the New Age baby-boomers – many of us ripe to accept his message; prepared to become vegetarians; to follow his lead in creating a positive alternative to a society we felt had lost its way with an unjust war, selfish consumerism, a synthetic and unnatural life and meaningless nine-to-five jobs. Here was evidence of the growing influence of the next wave of New Age synchronicity: connection with not only a global network, but with an ongoing countercultural tradition from our own past. Here were the messages my generation had not been getting: the alternatives we had already known must be there. Within a fortnight I had booked the Sydney Town Hall.

## **The Sydney Town Hall**

A month before meeting Fred my father gave me a cheque of over \$500 from a matured endowment policy that came due on the 20<sup>th</sup> of August 1971, my 24<sup>th</sup> birthday. Dad had been paying a few shillings every month for my whole life. When he handed me the cheque he had given me quite a talking-to about using this substantial sum wisely. He explained that it had been intended to help with the funding of possible tertiary education, or perhaps the starting of a business. I think he was a little concerned about how I might use it, but legally it couldn't go into his own bank account for safekeeping.

A month or so later, and after due New Age consideration, it seemed to me that there was no better way of spending this money than using it to kick-start Fred's 'coming out' to my generation. I knew this action would be seen by my father as a rash move, and that most of my old friends would think I had gone 'troppo'; but with my mother overseas on a round-the-world trip, I had one less worried person to contend with. I just did it. I withdrew the lot. I went to the Sydney Town Hall with my dog also called Townhall (it had been found on Town Hall station by a friend). I had a flower inserted in my bushy beard, and the wad of cash in my pocket. I said to the woman at the desk 'I want to book this place in about three weeks or so, what can you do for me?' I picked the first free Sunday: the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 1971. I then produced the wad of money and counted out the deposit to seal the deal, much to the surprise of the receptionist, who I suspect thought I was wasting her time.

In idiom used at the time, 'Fred was chuffed out of his brain'. I hadn't told him what I was doing until it had been worked out.

*I can hardly believe that my dream of reaching the mass-consciousness of Austral-Aquaria is coming to pass. I have prayed for this for over twenty years ... well, well, well ... a lecture at the Sydney Town Hall ... All is well and going according to Plan* (Fred Robinson, pers. comm., October 1971)

Fred immediately rang his spouse, the mysterious Mary, whom I had heard him talk about as his 'soul mate' and 'as a channel in her own right'. We spoke for a few moments about the Town Hall talk. Mary had a bit of an indistinct voice, like something was not quite right with her adenoids. She sent over to Fred his respectable grey suit, in which he was married – along with his shiny black shoes.

Fred now planned how he would approach this defining moment in his life, while I got to work publicising whatever it was he would do or say. Tapping my father's 'education fund' windfall I had a picture of Fred made into a huge purple poster. The text focused on the words 'Aquarian', 'New Age' and 'Cosmic', words I instinctively knew needed to be highlighted. The printing of a hundred of these huge five foot by three foot posters took another large chunk out of the endowment money. Along with other ephemera, this poster has been lost. There seemed to be too much happening to keep records or to find a place to keep anything once the initiative had passed.

These purple posters were semiotic masterpieces – they spoke eloquently of the New Age without having to read a word of the text. Fred's full face was in negative white on the purple background. *Go Set*, a Pop magazine of the time, kindly advertised Fred's 'gigs' after Sydney, and used it as the template, so the image and the words survive – and I have to admit that I wrote them, although a heavy Robinsonian emphasis is evident. The text was laid out in a V shape with Fred's smiling face in the middle:

Fred has been waiting for 40 years to talk to open-minded audiences.  
He has finally broken through the barrier of opinion & belief & speculation.  
Cosmic Law has been revealed.  
We are now in the Age of Aquarius.  
Love was sufficient for the Piscean Age.  
Love and Truth are both necessary for the Aquarian Age.  
To leave the polluted cities for communities is the only practical action we can take.  
The organic garden is the foundation.  
Extra-terrestrial beings have been observing this planet since we split the atom.



Few world teachers have so far acknowledged their presence or indicated the vital role they have to play in the transition to the New Age.  
Part of Fred's work is to communicate the role of the Space People, our Elder Brothers, and to present the information they are giving us, through attuned individuals, at this crucial moment in the planet's history.  
Fred Robinson is here to fill in the gaps in your information

Fred Robinsons talks on THE NEW AGE  
(Advertising Poster, reprinted in *GO-SET*, November 1971).

I asked friends who had visited Pine Grove to help put up the posters all around Sydney. We were going for the cultural jugular: *The Mass-consciousness*. Whatever this exactly referred to, we were going to awaken it from its Piscean slumber. Once the Aquarian wakefulness of *Limitless Love and Truth* could be 'clicked on' in people's heads, then perhaps the whole cosmic team of Fred's 'Elder Brothers' or 'Space People', the Theosophist's 'Mahatmas' or 'Ascended Masters', the Bible's 'Angels', and the Spiritualists 'Guides' ... and whoever else was out there, might be drawn into the fray to help us. While I understood that 'Cosmic Law' precluded unasked-for intervention in the affairs of Earth, we might just stimulate the populace to ask for it. How it all worked was unclear. What was clear was that it was getting people off drugs and into natural living. Who knew where it would all lead? Wherever it was headed, that was where I was going.

Having seen the purple posters, some meat-eating Pentecostal Christian friends with whom I was trying to develop a 'New Age oneness' (and turn into vegetarians), dropped in to see me and to meet Fred, the man I had spoken to them about. After a short, uncomfortable meeting, they bailed me up at the gate. They warned me in no uncertain terms: 'Stephen, Satan's on the prowl, he wants you! This Fred is a deceiver. He is not of God. Have nothing to do with him. Cancel the Town Hall talk'. The leader of this Christian scare-pack offered to reimburse me for the deposit money and the posters. I told them I would be going ahead. They promised to pray that I would 'come through my test and denounce Fred's evil message'. I countered with an equally annoying promise to pray that they 'would be able to move beyond their exclusive and closed-thinking'.

I remember telling Fred all that they said. He laughed long and heartily, saying, '*God bless their innocent hearts. They are in such fear of false prophets, they*

*wouldn't know a real one if they fell over him*'. I was even more determined to publicise the event.

The week before this event Fred said to me, *'I'm being "told" that you should speak'*. I just wasn't a speaker – but I had done a couple of TV interviews already, and was beginning to say a few things to introduce Fred at the Pine Grove meetings, and to promote biodynamic gardening at Fred's talks, so I was gradually gaining some confidence. Fred suggested, *'Just speak about your garden, your wheat grass and your alfalfa sprouts. It is important that someone of your generation speaks as well as me. They will have had enough of hearing my hot air, and I will need a break too'*.

My world had been turned upside down in the previous six months. As the day got closer, I decided to just do it. I had a Vacola jar of Alfalfa sprouts, and my rusty open tool-box, with the handle on it, full of wheat grass. I would use them as props and talk about wheat grass and sprouts and the biodynamic garden, and how we could nourish our bodies and enhance our lifestyle.

On Sunday evening the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 1971, as I watched the Town Hall begin to fill, I was presented with a range of feelings: I was trying to be detached, centred, attuned and 'living in the now'. It wasn't working. I was hoping and waiting for the standing-room-only scenario. That wasn't happening either. About eight hundred people came. They filled the stalls closest to the stage, and then were scattered about in the dress circle. Considering the posters that had gone up, I was disappointed that out of all of Sydney we couldn't fill the hall. I should have done more radio gigs – the one big gap in my publicity campaign. I had counted on word-of-mouth too much. I never really went along with the New Age theory that 'whatever happens is meant to happen'. However, it wasn't the time to be disappointed – eight hundred souls were waiting. Fred was about to start his talk.

Fred designed this lecture more thoroughly than he usually did. He took a while to warm up, but soon he was firing. He was delivering his ideas with power and considerable grace. However there was one major hiccup in the first fifteen minutes. My

sparring partner in prayer, the Pentecostal, with his pack of carnivorous Christians, started heckling Fred, who went silent. The Aquarian atmosphere of the evening was unravelling. Fred was letting them go on too long. Then a very strange thing happened. My father rose to his feet, raised his voice to full-force and pointed to me, saying, ‘I happen to know that this young man has paid a considerable sum of money to hire this Hall. I fought to keep this country free. If you don’t like what’s being said then leave or remain silent so that those who have come to listen to Fred, can hear what he has to say’. Applause rang out. Pin-drop-silence reigned as Fred took up the reins again.

This Town Hall talk had been a success in a number of ways. It put Fred and his message of *Limitless Love and Truth* before the general public, fulfilling his dream of ‘*breaking through to the mass-consciousness*’. Secondly, it generated more mainstream press. Thirdly, it became a catalyst for people to contact Fred at Pine Grove, now recognised as the *New Age Information Centre* for Sydney. This initiated a loose network of those who felt empathy. Finally, the talk itself, which was recorded, was used for years as an introduction to Fred’s full message, and was played to Seekers who came to the Community when Fred was not there in person.

The press release I wrote at the time was most successful in generating interviews for both print and electronic media. I always rang the targeted media recipients on the day I knew they would have received the information – just to add a personal burst of youthful enthusiasm. All I had learnt as a Production Assistant, Assistant Director and Editor in the film industry was now being put to use. I still have a copy of this document which indicates the new emphases in the Robinsonian message:

October 13, 1971.  
Phone: 993134.

**MR FRED ROBINSON**

Staying with the  
UNIVERSAL FOUNDATION at  
"Pine Grove"  
1895 Pittwater Road,  
BAYVIEW, N.S.W. 2104.  
Australia

Since being ruined financially in the last great depression, Fred Robinson has been seeking and finding solutions to the World's major social, environmental and spiritual problems:

During the last 9 years he and his wife Mary have been running an Information Centre on their 5 acre organic farm in Perth, Western Australia. They have been linking and sharing with "New Age" groups in various centres around the world. These groups all realise that this is an Age of Synthesis based on love and truth.

Mr Robinson has had 40 years of practical experience in an Alternative Life Style; he grows his own organic fruit, vegetables and nuts and lives on the barter system for he has no need to pay income tax or work for money.

On a number of previous occasions, he has attempted to arouse people's interest in forming small communities based on the order and harmony of the cosmic pattern.

In July at the age of 80 he was moved to try one last time to present the TRUTH to the people of Australia. He knows the masses will not comprehend his message, but knew the young would listen and that many would respond intuitively as he supplied information to fill in gaps in their understanding.

Many young people are moving out of the polluted city environs to set up communities. Most of these have been unsuccessful due to a lack of understanding of the whole situation in regard to Natural Law. Mr Robinson's experience and information has been of great value to these groups, some of which have been held back by the apathetic attitude of the escapists.

Part of Mr Robinson's work is to communicate an understanding of the role of the Space People our elder brothers, and to present the information they are giving us, through attuned individuals, at this crucial moment in the planet's history.

Neither the Universal Foundation nor Mr Robinson are sponsored by any Group, Religion or Sect. Their expenses are being perfectly met by love offerings from appreciative individuals.

STEPHEN CARTHEW.

Immediately after this Town Hall talk there was a flurry of New Age activity at Pine Grove. The place was cranking. Press interviews and private one-on-one consultations with Fred were interspersed with Fred's 'daily raves' on the lawn, amongst the organic vegetable patches or on the wide verandas. During these events he would go through his *Charts* and share his *Modern Revealed Knowledge*. He refused to argue the point

with anyone – ‘*it’s an absolute waste of time*’ – but he would not rest until everyone was finished asking questions. Few knew what to ask about some of the more curious elements of his schema.

## **Fred’s Degrees and Charts**

One of the most enigmatic aspects of Fred’s teachings was the need to raise one’s vibrations above thirty-three degrees. Pointing to the first of the three onion skin layers above a section of the Earth’s circumference which was marked out on one of his hand painted canvass charts, he would say:

*You need to get above 33 degrees ... above the Astral Region or lower heavens of the planet ... this region was never meant to exist. Here selfishness is, to a greater or lesser degree, the order of the day ... there are some quite good people in the astral realm. Cardinals and Popes and such like. Now, these lower heavens are tied to the Earth.*

*The next heaven, The First Resurrection, is between 34 and 66 degrees ... the degrees are a vibrational scale you understand ... everyone has their own vibration ... you can’t fake your vibration. If your rate of vibration is such that you land up in these ‘organic heavens’ as they are called ... it’s a wonderful place. Here all selfishness is a thing of the past. From here on it is all onwards and upwards. No endless reincarnation back and forth into a body to learn lessons. Initially these heavens were down on the earth. There was no astral region at all. It was always meant to be a smooth transition onwards and upwards into the spiritual dimensions.*

Then pointing to the third ‘heaven’ Fred would progress:

*The Second Resurrection as they call it is between 67 and 99 degrees. Here you are doing wonderful service for the planet ... working perhaps with the angels (they are a different life stream of course) or getting ready to move on to another series of experiences ... There are 49 levels of consciousness you know. First ‘Involution’ – God coming down into matter – then ‘Evolution’ matter going back up to God (who is pure spirit light energy – as well as a loving Father). First it’s Mineral life (the lowest form of atom); then Plant life (they have feelings you know); then the Animals; then Man. Now we are getting ready for the next great evolutionary jump – the next level of consciousness. There are 45 levels to go between us and the Creator. This next evolutionary step is what the New Age is all about ... it started on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 1848 ... when the whole planet began preparing to go up a step in vibration ... the fifth dimension is upon us in the very near future. It’s a wonderful reason to celebrate. I am not a prophet of doom and gloom; this is a message of joy and hope. The Oahspe tells us that the purpose of all learning is to be happy both here and hereafter.<sup>319</sup>*

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<sup>319</sup> This is Fred’s paraphrase of: ‘The greatest of all learning is to learn how to live in the best way, that we may be happy here and hereafter. There is no other learning so important as this’ (Oahspe 1891 and 1960, ‘Book of Jehovih’s Kingdom on Earth’, Chapter VIII v. 10, p. 814 [the 1960 edition retains the pagination of the 1891 edition]).

Turning back to the diagram after his digression, swirling his pointer stick around to encompass the whole chart, he would bring his audience back into the present:

*We are still looking at this planet. These are the heavens of this planet. There are all sorts of 'Heavens' ... all on higher and higher vibrations. Onwards and upwards is the rule of the universe. The point is 'what are you going to do about it? Are you going to go with the planet into the new dimension, helping to prepare the way for the children, or will you just go along with what you've been taught to believe?*

*Now that you can picture the heavens of the Earth we can turn to the chart which shows how the Local Universe works - all as part of the ever-expanding Omniverse ... and then we can look at **the part you can play** in God's Plan.*

Fred was always able to return to the main game of catalysing; having his information relate to the individual listener and the changes needed on a personal level. Audiences were riveted, nodding in agreement, while those who were not 'getting it' were fidgeting and wishing they were elsewhere. While no one had any idea of where these 33° – 66° – 99° came from, or what they meant, we connected with the vibration of *how* Fred said it, and with the main idea that we needed to move past our selfishness into a consciousness that exemplified *impersonal loving selfless service for the good of the whole*. Was this above 33°, or perhaps 66°, or even 99°? We used to laugh about this scale in the later Community: 'Was your fart in service this morning above 33°? ... Definitely not! Down to the astral region you go'. For all the serious intent, we saw the humour in the snakes and ladders effort of 'raising vibrations'.

Fred's cosmic theorisations never came out of his own head. He would instead innovatively combine a number of theories to form new hybrid concepts, effectively rationalising the conflicting 'truths' in his many schemata.

### **Derivation of Cosmic Theories**

I have been able to ascertain where some of Fred's cosmic theorisations were likely to have come from. Many of them were combinations of concepts. The Freemasonic Order of the Golden Centurion website reveals the likely source of Fred's vibrational 'degrees':

There were no special ranks or titles, every member had a number. The grandmaster had the number 99 not number 1. The numbers 1–33 represented the apprentice degrees, 34–66 the fellow-craft degrees, and 67–99 the high-and master degrees (<http://escotericmasons.com/candidate/fogc.html>, accessed 15.3.2011).

It seems Fred used these ‘degrees’ in his own way, ignoring the esoteric and hierarchical aspects and applying the model to a simple calibration of levels of selfishness. Being over 33° was saying that the person had reached an acceptable level of unselfishness. Fred never tried to say who was at what degree, but saw it as a cosmic calibration of God’s making. He did not in my experience talk about the Freemasonic derivation of these *degree sequences*. In fact by the time I met Fred he not only had little to do with Freemasonry, but saw it as another arm of his overarching world-wide conspiracy theory – a theme taken up today by a new generation of conspiracy theorists.<sup>320</sup>

The idea that *the organised or organic heavens were tied to the earth* was provided by the *Oahspe Bible* (Oahspe 1891, pp. 16–17); while the charts of the Omniverse (as Fred called it) and our Local Universe were designed to explain the *Urantia Book’s* cosmology.

Fred’s take on reincarnation was particularly innovative. *Oahspe* and *Urantia* taught that the soul would not return to this world. Fred had come to see reincarnation as an aberration of God’s Plan, brought into existence by *the Lucifer Rebellion*. Although both his key reference books denied reincarnation, Fred himself said ‘*I know it is true through my experiences with Ione and Syd Cadman* (Fred Robinson, pers. comm., 1972). He was forced to rationalise:

*Although reincarnation is a fact, it was never meant to be part of God’s Plan – which is all about upwards and onwards rather than this ping-pong business up and down, up and down ... but this all changed on this planet due to the Lucifer Rebellion – all of which is spelled out in the Urantia Book [1955, pp. 601–620]; and so we see how reincarnation came into being* (Fred Robinson, lectures, 1970s).

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<sup>320</sup> Hundreds of such conspiracy theories have been developed since the late eighteenth-century. Generally, these theories fall into three distinct categories: political (usually involving allegations of control of government, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom), religious (usually involving allegations of anti-Christian or Satanic beliefs or practices), and cultural (usually involving popular entertainment). Many conspiracy theory writers have connected Freemasons (and the Knights Templar) with worship of the devil; these ideas are based on misinterpretations of the doctrines of those organisations ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masonic\\_conspiracy\\_theories](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masonic_conspiracy_theories), accessed 15.3.2011). See also Chapter 5, Part 2, ‘Fred the Social Credit Conspiracy Theorist’, and footnote 104.

The start of the ‘Kosmon Era’ for Fred meant that March 1848 was important on many levels, not just the beginning of modern Spiritualism. His theory was that spiritual/cosmic vibrations were unleashed at that time, and that they precipitated a *string of disruptions to the old order in preparation for the new conditions*. Historically speaking the 1848 Revolutions certainly changed the ‘old world’.<sup>321</sup> Fred Robinson’s theory fits with the facts, but then this was prophecy after, rather than before an event.

While Templar/Masonic/Rosicrucian history or teachings all produce connections with Fred’s theories, most significant is a March 1848 connection with the gymnosophist heritage, which may have been a source for Parcæ and Ione Long’s naturist innovation within Heindel’s Rosicrucian Order. The possible connections have been bolded:

The Rite of Memphis was constituted by Jacques Etienne Marconis de Nègre in 1838, as a variant of the Rite of Misraïm, combining elements from Templarism and chivalry with Egyptian and alchemical mythology. It had at least two lodges (“Osiris” and “Des Philadelphes”) at Paris, two more (“La Bienveillance” and “De Heliopolis”) in Brussels, and a number of English supporters. The Rite gained a certain success among military Lodges. It took on a political dimension and in 1841 it became dormant, probably because of the repression following the armed uprising of Louis Blanqui’s Société des Saisons in 1839. With the overthrow of Louis-Philippe in 1848, **the Order was revived on March 5**, with its most prominent member being Louis Blanc a socialist member of the provisional government with responsibility for the National Workshops ... Despite the attempts of Jean Philibert Berjeau to dissolve the *Philadelphes*, they implemented this proposal and elected Edouard Benoît as master. This group became renowned for their involvement in revolutionary politics. **However the Gymnosophists** and the *L’Avenir* lodges remained with Berjeau. In 1860 the **number of degrees was reduced to 33**, and by 1866 Berjeau dissolved them, **most of the Gymnosophists joining the Philadelphes** ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rite\\_of\\_Memphis-Misra%C3%AFm#cite\\_note-2](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rite_of_Memphis-Misra%C3%AFm#cite_note-2), accessed 15.3.2011).

I do remember Fred talking about a nineteenth-century order of gymnosophists who were *the modern forerunners of The Work with Ione*, perhaps the gymnosophists within the Philadelphes Order, since much of their system chimes with Fred’s.

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<sup>321</sup> The European Revolutions of 1848, known in some countries as the Spring of Nations, Springtime of the Peoples, or The Year of Revolution, were a series of political upheavals throughout Europe. Described by some historians as a revolutionary wave, the period of unrest began in France, with the French Revolution of 1848, and soon spread to the rest of Europe ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolutions\\_of\\_1848](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolutions_of_1848), accessed 16.3.2011). Historically speaking March 1848 is the most prominent month of these revolutions (<http://www.cusd.chico.k12.ca.us/~bsilva/projects/revs/1848time.html>, accessed 16.3.2011).



The sources of Fred's 'raves' were however unimportant even to his keenest listeners in the early 1970s. It was his delivery and his lived countercultural and alternative life-style experience which were impressive. The media were impressed too, but the media's response was always shifting, dependent on the main-stream culture's perceived positioning of the Back-to-the-land movement, the New Age collective, and New Religious Movements – 'cults'. Where did Fred Robinson's movement fit within these? The media were as uncertain as the new Age audiences.

## **Part 2: The Media's Response to Fred**

While the full history of the eventful weeks between the *kick-starting* Town Hall talk and the start of the New Age Community are beyond the scope of this thesis, the media's reaction to the remainder of Fred Robinson's speaking tour is significant. In Ricoeurian terms, the media now 'emplotted' Fred Robinson in new narratives, influencing how the general community – both young and old – perceived him, and his unlikely message.

### **'Pop Guru' in *The Sun***

The media too were finding links between Fred Robinson's ideas, and those of the many young Australians exerting entirely new demands on the social fabric. They began a discursive compound founded part on youth culture phrasing, and part on Fred Robinson's social, political, religious programs of change. A week after the Town Hall talk, Chris Anderson of Melbourne's *Sun Herald* wrote in terms that further bolstered Fred Robinson's appeal to the New Agers he had come to assist. The article accentuated and reified Fred's *appeal* to youth. Titled "'Pop Guru' Lost Faith in Money' (7.11.1971, p. 6), an interview 'at a friend's place at Pittwater, on the northern beaches' (ibid.), reveal the mood of the mainstream press as it grappled with the unlikely match of Fred and his youth following: 'Australia's latest pop idol is an 80 year old "health addict" who has lived on the barter system since the Depression' (ibid.). While not exactly factual it is an arresting concept. The Robinson story was snowballing, and the publicity was attracting even more media coverage:

Thousands of fans throughout Australia have been turning up to hear “pop guru” Fred Robinson deliver a message of “peace and love.” Last Sunday more than 700 teenagers turned up to hear him, and tonight a capacity crowd is expected for a similar performance at Melbourne’s Myer Music Bowl. Mr. Robinson – who runs a “hippie commune” with his wife, Mary, outside Perth – has lived without money since the

1930s. Mr Robinson said this week he was making one last try to convince Australians to accept a “new lifestyle”. But he wasn’t interested in trying to convince the “older generation to change”. He added: “I’ve been trying to do that for 35 years and it’s a waste of time. They are incapable of understanding the gigantic changes needed” (Anderson 1971, p. 6).

By now the Robinson figure is squarely associated with the youth culture accoutrements of the late 1960s shift to a highly coloured neo-Romantic mysticism, in which “gurus”, Indian spiritual leaders, had become part of the turn towards a heightened sensitivity; a drive towards higher consciousness, and universal emphasis on social harmony and emotional expressiveness. With the Beatles anthem, *‘All You Need is Love’* (1967), Fred Robinson’s ‘gigantic changes’ appeared to be on the way – even to some Australian journalists. Journalistic acceptance/rejection depended on the degree to which they now read Robinson’s ‘pop guru’ role as either just such a performance: a form of entertainment, staged at large public venues and commanding the sort of rapturous response usually reserved for pop stars; or as a real global change – as Fred persuasively assured/implored a new generation of journalists to believe.

Robinson’s audiences were no longer either the ‘families’ and ‘spiritual communities’ of his Western Australian New Age ventures; nor his Australia-wide semi-religious readership seeking to dedicate themselves to “harmony”; but instead “fans”, “teenagers”, and “crowds”, drawn by the “pop philosopher” from a “hippie commune”. Perversely, in the sort of ‘resistance’ identity politics common to the era (see for instance Hebdige 1987, pp. 158–159)<sup>322</sup> the press statements that ridiculed Fred only further induced young readers/listeners to endorse him. Fred Robinson had become a sage of a new tribe; one of the few ready to leap the generation gap. Seen as a fanatic by most parents and establishment figures, Fred was ready to embrace both his new-found acceptance, and yet another round of mainstream rejection. Being strongly against

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<sup>322</sup> Richard ‘Dick’ Hebdige (born 1951) is an expatriate British media theorist and sociologist. Currently a professor of film, media studies and art at the University of California, Santa Barbara, he is most commonly associated with the study of subcultures, and its resistance against the mainstream of society ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dick\\_Hebdige](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dick_Hebdige), accessed 24.10.2010).

drugs, Fred was able to command some respect from those on the wrong side of the generation gap: ‘The 80 year old “pop philosopher” is also strongly against drugs and all forms of artificial stimulants’ (Anderson 1971, p. 6). This was not however the sole positioning of ‘*The Work*’ – but rather an important codicil to Fred’s *organocosmic* life-style message. This positioning, rather than an ‘anti-drug’ stance, was a tactic that promoted something better – the *natural high*. Fred also charged the *multinationals*, *world-wide conspirators* or *the enemies of society* with having intentionally engineered the drug epidemic. Equating it with the commercial cigarette industry, he argued that the conspirators were deliberately trying to entrap the New Agers, making them subservient to addictions and so unable to fulfil their destined role as agents of social and spiritual change. It was a totally different strategy from the mainstream’s ‘no drug’ instruction. Fred was supporting a life-style ‘yes’, allowing for a *beyond-drugs* holistic experience of real community and selfless service; while the mainstream tried to enforce a life-style ‘no’, disallowing drugs and any meaningful new-lifestyle options. The establishment wanted youth back at work. Fred saw most worldly work as a waste of time.

## **GO-SET and the Space Captain**

A couple of days after Anderson’s article the alternative press magazine *GO-SET* featured Fred in an almost 1,000 word article by Stephen Maclean, entitled ‘**A Message from the Space Captain**’ (13.11.1971, p. 9). This added to Fred’s charismatic draw as a fascinator of the young. The way the alternative and mainstream press worked together to promote Fred Robinson is revealing. For the most part, they were accessing entirely different audiences, and deploying widely variant discourses. In the following *GO-SET* extract, Fred is represented as the respected elder of a countercultural tribe of ‘cosmic believers’ – yet this “respect” is afforded through use of what is at most levels its opposite: a countercultural colloquialism and breezy new-age idiom which is very much a marker of its era (the italics are mine):

At 80 years of age, Fred Robinson is far more *into what’s happening* now and in the future than are the people 60 years his junior... Fred Robinson is a *Cosmic believer*, and he doesn’t seem *spaced out* in the slightest... A few centuries back Fred

might possibly have been burnt at the stage [sic] for his philosophies. Not so in 1971: He spent several hours at the Yellow House and also spoke at a receptive *crowd of freaks* who attended the recent Ourimbah free festival... Fred also believes in a Space

Captain, and he produced a photographed etching of him... Sure enough, the face conveyed the message inscribed underneath: "Limitless love and truth."

Many may scoff at the actuality of flying saucers... but even *the super-cynics* would find it difficult to doubt Fred's sincerity ...

and while he *spreads the message*, Fred is giving valuable pointers on the functionality of communes, diets, and several other fundamentals of importance to the so-called rock generation... Fred will be giving *several more raps* in Sydney and Melbourne. *GO-SET* will keep you posted on dates and place (MacLean 1971, p. 9).

All the clichés are intact, even if sitting rather incongruously beside what is otherwise relatively objective and unexceptional reporting. The coding is just enough to chime with the younger readership – without losing the fundamental information. What it signals of course is a sympathetic reception: a press prepared to admit Robinson's expertise, partly founded in his communitarian and health-regime experience, and not, for this audience at least, diminished by his wilder "Space Captain" claims. For this younger set, intent upon founding a reformed social order, and prepared to consider any and all messages hitherto suppressed, Fred Robinson's combination of a communal past, a sage-like appearance, a capacity for mass public performance, and above all a set of flattering assertions about 'New Age souls' had particular currency:

Fred feels young people are the ones who will put it into action. "The old ones are too etched in their ways to see the truth," says Fred. "They're lost. But young people instinctively grasp the new age." The new age, says Fred, will make life as we know it

obsolete: "a complete depression will bring an end to money as it is now valued and with industry as we know it eliminated, the problem of pollution will be conquered (Maclean 1971, p. 9).

This was a moment when old hierarchies, old paradigms, old explanations were being swept away, and with very few alternative figures remaining to validate the new. With all that had gone before revealed as a lie, all possible truths had to be considered. Fred Robinson emerged with what seemed like certainty, prepared to offer judgment in his usual absolutist terms: '... we're now meeting many young people whose intuition is very well developed, it will be quite impossible to deceive the children, utterly impossible to tell them a lie' (ibid.). The alternative press in particular enjoyed this rare validation of their own worldview, and as *quid pro quo*, was more than generous towards Fred, actively promoting his 'raps' or 'raves'; exalting him, and his more outrageous ideas, and building him a *cosmic space* at the core of the countercultural alternative movement. Fred now had a forum for his own views in his own voice; an actively networking conduit to the heart of his new target market.

Fred could not resist supplying a couple of dates to Maclean, the enquiring young *GO-SET* interviewer; dates were still a tangible hook on which to hang the urgency of the planet's plight: 'When will we see the end result? "Dates are hard to play with, but there's a date fixed in the future from an astrological point of view: one is 1984' (Maclean 1971, p. 9).<sup>323</sup> Thirteen years was too far away to have any real impact on his audiences. In my experience of Fred's 'dates', six or seven years were an optimum period; there was possibly time to *do something*, as long as it was begun immediately: 'There's one great date before that – the 16<sup>th</sup> of July 1978, and in my belief, by 1978, all that is evil and bad in this world will have gone to its own end' (ibid.).<sup>324</sup> Even this seven years time-frame needed qualification. Fred liked to spell out the urgency by focussing his audience on an even nearer future: 'But some lunatic might decide to press an atomic button next week or next year and precipitate that change' (Fred Robinson, in Maclean, 1971, p. 9).

## The Prophet and Loss Crank

With assertions such as those above, it was not long before Fred began to lose the support of the mainstream press. The media were already reverting to the "ratbag", "crank" positionings of Fred's earliest foray into New Religious Movements, although they had not linked the 1940s 'Brother Fred' of his ROTA days, or even the more recent

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<sup>323</sup> According to some Jehovah's Witness writers the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 1984 was a date given for 'the end of the world' (<http://www.abhota.info/end3.htm>, accessed 25.10.2010). While it was likely Fred gleaned this date from a Jehovah's Witness source, possibly even a JW home visit (something Fred encouraged) there is much more to the selection of this date: it fitted perfectly with Fred's adoption of George Orwell's dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) for his own purposes. As literary political fiction, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a classic novel. Many of its terms and concepts, such as *Big Brother*, *doublethink*, *thoughtcrime*, *Newspeak*, and *Memory Hole* have become contemporary vernacular. In addition, the novel popularised the adjective *Orwellian*, which refers to propaganda, lies, or manipulation of the past in the service of a totalitarian agenda ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nineteen\\_Eighty-Four](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nineteen_Eighty-Four), accessed 25.10.2010). There may have been some other prophetic/astrological reason for the use of this year as one of Fred's 'dates'; wherever it came from, it certainly suited Fred to have this iconic marker in reserve. It was over a dozen years away at the time of his greatest publicity moment ... and was still in the future when he died in 1983.

<sup>324</sup> Just where this exact date came from is not easy to trace. It is possible Fred had heard of the Jehovah's Witness eschatological author John Strong's prediction which drew on scriptures, pyramidology, pole shift theory, young-earth creationism and other mysticism to conclude that Doomsday would come in 1978 (<http://www.abhota.info/end3.htm>, accessed, 25.10.2010). However, as this prophecy was not published until 1973 as *The Doomsday Globe*, it is just as likely the 1978 prophecy derived from one of the New Age Channels communicating with *Shalam Light* at the time. There is no extraordinary astrological prediction I can find. Fred did not highlight where he got his 'dates' from. He simply heard them and then used them.

1967 *Universal Link* 'doomsdayer' to this 1970s make-over of 'Fred the Pop Guru' and 'Space Captain Fred'. Light-hearted pieces filled with bad puns and the sorts of incongruity born of bathos, more common in formal satire, began to be published. The day after the *GO-SET* feature, Sydney's *Sunday Telegraph* ran an article titled '**Earth's Prophet and Loss Account: Fred Robinson... the New Age will begin about 1978**' (Clarke, 14.11.1971, p. 27). By-lined journalist Julie Clarke likened Fred to a biblical prophet: 'Before you read this story, recall the story of Noah... Fred Robinson has not filled in a tax return for 40 years... He has a face like an old Prophet; it is brown and very wise' (ibid.). The juxtaposition: biblical prophet; mundane tax return, entirely deflates any gravitas the article might have achieved. At the same time the direct personal address: 'Before you read this story, recall the story of Noah...' illustrates exactly how the writer is manipulating the text-genres; positioning the reader; swinging them from one perspective to another. After quoting extensively his cosmic change predictions Clarke appeals directly to the reader: 'If you find Mr. Robinson's metaphysics rather far-fetched – and he quite expects that you will – you might give more attention to the practical side of his advice' (ibid.), then goes on to quote his claim to have '... found the cause of all sickness. It is a clogged system' (ibid.). As with one claim, so with the other: Mr Robinson is not to be taken at face value. Here the journalist – and the readership which she clearly anticipates will share the vision – is set up to both receive the information, and enjoy the knowledge that writer and reader are as much capable of quietly laughing at the 'practicalities' of a 'clogged system' as they do at the 'far-fetched' metaphysics. The amusement might be contained and well-humoured, but the writing invites it along.

News was getting back to Perth about Fred's successes. *The Sunday Independent's* article '**80 and Top of the Pops**' (published on the same day as Clarke's article), reveals the frenetic publicity associate with the early days of the movement, where Fred was flown by a television station for the day to appear on a programme. The writer, being from Perth, was also aware of Fred's appearance at Australia's first rock festival at Ourimbah:

Australia's current 'pop philosopher', 80 year old Fred Robinson of Armadale said yesterday he had given up trying to educate 'oldies' to a new life style of peace and love.

Speaking in Melbourne before he flew to Sydney for a television appearance, Mr Robinson said he was aiming his message to young mature adults. 'They still have a chance to establish a positive new way of life,' the white-haired, trim Mr Robinson said.

Eastern states' newspapers have hailed the Perth health addict – 'I live strictly on organic foods and herbs' – as a pop guru.

Nearly 1,000 teenagers went to hear Mr Robinson's philosophy in Sydney Town Hall recently and he has had a similar response in Melbourne.

He spoke out strongly against drugs and other artificial stimulants ... Now on a nationwide crusade, Fred Robinson first attracted a 'pop' following at a NSW teenage festival two years ago ... He expects to return to Perth in early December and to speak at teenage rally soon after. (*The Sunday Independent*, 14.11.1971, p. 14).

## **The Pied Piper Plays Melbourne's Music Bowl**

After holding a number of packed-house, garden and veranda meetings at my New Age Information (now *Instigation*) Centre in Bayview, it was time to move on to Melbourne – almost as if to start the next franchise. John Wentworth drove us in his new car and returned almost immediately to attend to the aftermath of interest at Pine Grove. I remember we kept asking Fred questions so that John could stay awake. Fred could never go to sleep when there was a question to answer.

I had already hired the Myer Music Bowl, using the rest of my life assurance windfall. In Melbourne my cousin Rosemary added her considerable public-relations skills, enormous energy and goodwill to the movement, giving it more momentum and breadth. She knew many people too, and together we saw the 'increment of association' in action.<sup>325</sup> Rosemary helped organise a line-up of rock stars and folk singers to perform at what we then called, without any sense of cliché, "a happening". This had

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<sup>325</sup> The *increment of association* was a phrase Fred employed from his Major Douglas reading: '... wealth is a pool upon which people can draw, and the efficiency gained by individuals cooperating in the productive process is known as the "unearned increment of association" – historic accumulations of which constitute what Douglas called the cultural heritage' ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_Credit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Credit), accessed 24.9.09). Fred had adapted this concept to physical labour and any work that is incrementally advantaged by people doing something together, as exemplified in the adage 'many hands make light work'. This theory was a basic plank of Fred's call to start organic back-to-the-land spiritually motivated Communities. Unfortunately the converse also applies when people get together: 'Too many cooks spoil the broth'. Most organisations experience both.

been much assisted by a friend of Rosemary's, Hans Poulsen.<sup>326</sup> Hans appreciated Fred's message, but as with Rosemary and me, was not so attuned to the 'heavy' apocalyptic version of a New Age.

Fred and I were able to stay with Donald and Erica Groom at their new base, the Friends' House in Toorak. As the Secretary of the Australian Society of Friends, being my earlier mentor, and having read some of the publicity, Donald clearly appreciated that Fred was able to attract the attention of young people in a way that the Quakers could not, and was seriously interested in assisting the movement. After he returned from a trip to India – where he told me 'I must try to bring some mutual friends together in peace' – Donald was planning to move to Perth where his grown children were living. Donald Groom died on the 11<sup>th</sup> August 1972, on his way to meet with Jai Prakash Narayan and Indira Gandhi during the crisis that occurred after the formation of Bangladesh (Rigney 2002, xxii–xiii).

The press had been alerted to the up-coming Myer Music Bowl event, and I confidently expected that Fred would take Melbourne by storm. Journalist Virginia Duigan was at the Myer Music Bowl on the afternoon of either the 7<sup>th</sup> or the 21<sup>st</sup> of November to see Fred; the title of her feature article in the Life-Style Section of *The Bulletin* dubbed Fred '**A Pied Piper for the Young**' (4.12.1971, pp. 21–22). Duigan painted this word picture of the event, and of Fred as its central figure:

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<sup>326</sup> Hans Sven Poulsen is an Australian singer-songwriter popular in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1965 Hans formed the first version of Melbourne group 18<sup>th</sup> Century Quartet, and performed in a style that later came to be known as world-music. Embarking on a solo career in 1967, Hans scored two Australian pop hits with the songs 'Boom Sha La La Lo' and 'Light Across the Valley' (both in 1970). In 1972 Hans relocated to the Findhorn Foundation Community in north east Scotland, where he recorded three albums. Hans's career was cut short in the late 1970s when he suffered first cancer and then a stroke ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans\\_Poulsen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_Poulsen), accessed 15.8.2010).



Up on the windswept stage of the Myer Music Bowl two folksingers are giving out melodic social conscience numbers on pollution and portents. It's a predominantly young audience, about 200 strong, wearing the international language of the hip young. This is a meeting of the faithful, presided over by their prophet, Fred Robinson, 80 years old. One newspaper has called him Australia's latest pop idol. Elegant in a dove-grey suit,

opposed to drugs, money and promiscuity, he is an unlikely youth hero. But everywhere he goes on this current lecture tour he generates an extraordinary response. More than 700 teenagers turned up to hear him at the Sydney Town Hall, and similar numbers would have undoubtedly rallied in Melbourne but for the dismal weather (Duigan, in *The Bulletin*, 4.12.1971, p. 21).

The weather was so bad on the 7<sup>th</sup>, the Music Bowl Management offered a reduced fee for another event two weeks later – which I paid for – but the weather was nearly as dismal. In a sense these setbacks in attendance didn't matter, it was the publicity about them that was having an impact. Duigan goes on to quote Fred directly, including his prophecies about 'the cataclysmic Armageddon to come' (ibid.) and explaining the flying saucer message in lay terms:

To the average citizen reared on nuclear milk this is quite believable and not much of a revelation. But it's at this point that the novel part of Mr. Robinson's message comes in. "Benevolent beings from elsewhere in the universe are currently patrolling the planet

to ensure we don't blow ourselves into oblivion and upset the delicately poised cosmic balance – these space people "from God's University" arrive and depart in flying saucers, and are ready to impart cosmic knowledge to believers (ibid.).

Describing Fred's relationship with young people, Duigan suggests that he 'inspires a devotion bordering on religious fervour among his immediate young disciples'. Likening him to Baden-Powell, she concludes that 'Fred Robinson preaches the need for preparation. His "take to the hills and build your own Eden with pure food and clean air" type of philosophy explains much of his appeal to people already disenchanted with society'. She admits that 'There is, too, a strong sense of serenity and obvious happiness about him. He says: "My wife and I have no problems whatsoever. No fears, doubts or worries about the future." And that one has to believe' (Duigan, in *The Bulletin*, 4.12.1971, p. 22).

## Adelaide: On the Way to *Shangri La*

After holding a series of talks in Melbourne during November and early December, Fred and I flew to Adelaide, expecting a major press conference in response to our press releases. The rest of the entourage was either hitching or driving. At the airport there was a huddle of press – but we soon discovered they were there to interview ‘Herman’ the zombie from *The Munsters*, who was on the same flight.<sup>327</sup> I tried to enlist him, but he was definitely not a New Ager. I had booked the Adelaide Town Hall just before leaving Melbourne. With money running low, I was praying for an inflow of ‘love offerings’, and received just that at the last of Fred’s series of Melbourne talks. I will never forget Jean Lee (a nurse in her fifties) handing me a wad of notes – amounting to \$300.<sup>328</sup> I was sure that the ‘Laws of Manifestation’ were at work and my prayers had been answered. Without this money the campaign would have faltered badly.

In Adelaide an article headlined ‘**HAPPY HIPPY, 80, HERE**’ (*The Adelaide Advertiser*, 26.11.1971) reveals the level of performance the lectures were taking: ‘He will address the youth of Adelaide at Elder Park on Sunday [28.11.1971] and in Adelaide Town Hall on Monday night. Both lectures will be preceded by a “new age” musical recital by singer Hans Poulsen’ (ibid.). The rest of the article follows a line that was becoming increasingly popular: ‘Australia’s oldest “hippie” arrived in Adelaide today’ (ibid.). A headshot of Fred had the caption: ‘Fred Robinson . . . lives by barter’, which echoed the text that meant the most to Fred’s target audience: ‘Mr Robinson runs a five-acre organic farm 20 miles from Perth. He and his wife grow their own organic fruit, vegetables, and nuts. He lives on the barter system, and has no need to work for money or pay income tax’ (*The Adelaide Advertiser*, 26.11.1971). Fred cut out the article and sent it to Mary with a note in the margin: ‘*Saw this in the Adelaide paper. Looked quite a good photo of the old blighter*’.

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<sup>327</sup> Herman Munster, 5th Earl of Shroudshire, is a fictional character in the CBC sitcom *The Munsters*, originally played by Fred Gwynne ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herman\\_Munster](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herman_Munster), accessed 15.12.2010).

<sup>328</sup> Jean Lee was to join the Shalam-Carranya Community in Western Australia in about 1973. She was mainly based at Shalam with Fred and Mary. Lee bought the first of the dozen or so railway carriages for the Carranya Community, and taught yoga. She stayed for about two years. For reasons I never quite understood she left suddenly – after a fall-out with Mary Robinson.

Publicity was ongoing, for the interviews from Melbourne were gradually being published. Darryl Green, writing in the Religion Section of *The Review*, '**Prophet of Doom Comes in from the Far West**' (3.12.1971), had evidently also attended one of the two Music Bowl concerts. Here the humorous description of the event: 'The show started off with some long-haired pop-style singers with poorly tuned guitars', sets the stage for a light hearted piece about an eccentric and colourful character: 'Soon Fred arrived in pale grey suit, grey shoes, white shirt and grey tie. He has a full head of pure white hair and a small white beard. Around his neck is a heavy silver cross on a silver chain'. Green must have enjoyed the interview with his subject after the concert for he comments that 'Fred has a soft accent which made me think he may also be acquainted with the leprechauns' (ibid.).

One especially negative response to Green's article about Fred is worthy of note. Maynard Davies of Beecroft, NSW, in Letters to the Editor (10.12.1971) upbraids Green in a tirade the editor headed '**That Old Time Religion**'. For Green to even mention Robinson in a religious column was, it appears, heresy: '...his article last week on the amiable lunatic Fred Robinson does nothing to illuminate the religious scene, unless science fiction now qualifies as religion' (ibid.). If Davies still lives, how furious he must be now that science fiction has spawned some of the fastest-growing 'religions' in the world.

Our New Age troupe now gathered in Adelaide was to make the crossing to Western Australia, a pilgrimage to the *Shangri-la* of Shalam, hub of New Age activity for the 'Austral-Aquarians'. There we were to meet Mary Robinson and spend a couple of weeks. Fred and I went by train (he had a return ticket), while the others hitched or flew across, guitars, sitars and bongos hanging off every shoulder. A major event had been organised at the Parkerville Amphitheatre in the Hills around Perth, featuring Fred and Hans Poulsen, who had been with us since Melbourne. With his hit, 'Boom Sha La La Lo' still on people's lips, Hans was a definite crowd puller. In Adelaide, I met a young Adelaide artist, Louise Feneley, and we fell in love. She was to join us in Western Australia a week after we arrived – we were married two weeks later. Five grandchildren and forty years later our love story continues.

An atmosphere of *carnival* had begun pervading these events, liberating us in true Bakhtinian fashion from ‘prevailing truth and from the established order’ (Bakhtin 1968, p. 10).<sup>329</sup> With the ‘New Age’ finding its voice and its image, we were organising not so much a lecture tour as a series of what would later be termed multi-media events.

## **My Alignment with Fred**

My own *Fredification* was completed by the time the tour had finished in Perth on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December 1971. While always disagreeing about Fred’s ‘End of the World’ prophecies, I accepted almost everything else Fred Robinson said. He had done the ‘research’ for me. I had listened to him speak literally hundreds of times in a range of communication events: interviews with journalists in print, radio and television; lectures in public places and people’s homes; and many informal ‘raves’ to both groups and during one-on-one teaching with me at Pine Grove, and in cars, and indeed anywhere we were. Fred never seemed to tire. His energy was promethean. He had been in training for this his whole life. Feeling understood at last, he would say ‘*twenty hours a day is not enough to do the incredible work that needs to be done*’ – and his enthusiasm was contagious. The experience was not dissimilar to that of a press agent undertaking a political election campaign. Soon you know the lines so well. While you may not believe every plank, you agree with the overall platform.

The response to Fred’s message had been phenomenal everywhere we went. We had good reason to believe Fred when he said ‘*this is the start of the breakthrough to the mass-consciousness*’. From a personal point of view I was extremely grateful to Fred for his contribution in ‘filling in the gaps in my understanding’. It seems he was happy to be sharing his information too, for the last entry in my childhood autograph book reads: ‘*To Stephen, the man who sucked me dry like an orange, Fred Robinson*’. Soon I was building up rhetorical muscles I never dreamed I had, for Fred

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<sup>329</sup> Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895–1975) was a Russian philosopher, literary critic, semiotician and scholar who worked on literary theory, ethics, and the philosophy of language ... *Carnivalesque* is a term he coined, which refers to a literary mode that subverts and liberates the assumptions of the dominant style or atmosphere through humour and chaos ... ordinary life and its rules and regulations are temporarily suspended and reversed, such that the riot of Carnival is juxtaposed with the control of the Lenten season ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail\\_Bakhtin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail_Bakhtin); <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carnivalesque>, accessed 25.8.2010).

encouraged me to add my own flavour and understandings to any of his teachings as I saw fit, and to adapt his information to that of the Universal Foundation at Pine Grove, even if I presented other views. At this time I still thought that my association with Anthony Brooke and the Universal Foundation might have a life after Fred's tour was over, and when I returned to Sydney. Fred was very respectful of my own space and my own plans. I could see that Fred was a real crowd puller. His presence said as much as his teachings, and perhaps more. Although I was ambivalent about Fred's prophecies, I had to admit that Fred's knack for prophecy was part of his drawing power – it did seem to awaken people from Piscean slumber. I was slowly recognising that this was to be more than a one-off public relations campaign.

### **Meeting Mary Robinson**

After Fred's six month lecture tour, Mary Robinson was on the platform of the Perth Railway Terminal to meet Fred and me on December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1971. My relationship was to be quite different with Mary. Fred had let me do whatever I wanted. Mary spoke her mind clearly about anything I did which she saw problems with – and there were many of these. Although not as counterculturally 'cool' as Fred, it was clear that Mary was responsible for making Shalam work. Following the respect and love I saw Fred had for her, I soon began appreciating the 'soul-polishing' she practised on me. I needed straightening out – and Mary taught more by actions than words. While Fred *talked* about the New Age, Mary *acted*. Often her actions were unpopular – but there would have been no Community without Mary Robinson. While the stories of her leadership and that of the later CentreCore make for controversial copy and provide an easy target for a critical reading of the movement, many positive contributions were made to society via what became the Universal Brotherhood – not least of them Mary Broun-Robinson's commitment to the cause of *managing Fred*.

### **Working the Hometown**

There were some young people who had been connected with Shalam for years prior to Fred raising its profile in the Eastern States. They had helped him get to Ourimbah, and had organised an event at Parkerville Amphitheatre on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> of December.

The poster which they put together, which included a photo of Fred, was headed '**The Age of Aquarius, Fred Robinson Talks on A New Age of Love**'. It is clearly pitched to the young generation:

A new vibe's spreading around space ship earth – some call it cosmic consciousness others simply say "love". During the last ten years you've heard more and more pop groups and artists singing songs about love and peace. "The Space Captain as *GO-SET* called him, talks about the same thing – love peace, truth – young people getting it together now and in the future, in this New Age.

This eighty year old pop guru is often compared to Krishnamurti or Maharishi Mahesh Yogi – Why? Because Fred talks about vibrations, yoga, meditation, U.F.Os, cosmic consciousness, organic food, communes, love and Jesus Christ. During the last six weeks he has been on A.B.C.'s

GTK and other T.V. programmes, you may have read about him in *GO-SET*, *Sound Blast* or the *Daily Planet*. He returns to his home-town Perth on December 5<sup>th</sup> to talk to young open-minded people about their future.

A young people's co-operative will be selling organic natural food on the day, and preceding Fred's talk, well known musician Hans Poulsen will give a short new age recital. What does Fred say. "Change yourself, not this world – live by love and peace – establish the positive, don't fight the negative". Sunday December 5<sup>th</sup> 3pm at Parkerville Amphitheatre. ORGANIC FOOD WILL BE SOLD ON THE DAY (Poster written by Perth alignee, December 1971).

Journalist Robin Oliver was in the audience at Parkerville. He came to one of the Robinsons' friend's places for an interview later that evening. On the Monday the following article '**All we Need is Love, says the Guru in the Grey Flannel Suit**', appeared in Oliver's 'This Town' column of the *West Australian* (6.12.1971). It features the 'Space Captain' plotment, now becoming the favoured focus of journalists. Written in good humoured manner, it like other mainstream examples employs the tongue-in-cheek knowledge that Fred is a well meaning crank. The article also marks the end of Fred's attempt at a kind of dress-based respectability. It was not long after this article that Mary had a dream in which she saw Fred in a sequined headband with the symbols of the Christian cross inside the *Urantia* logo – three concentric circles. Soon the grey flannel suit was no more. Fred's white hair was grown longer to give the headband something to do, while purple ponchos and even more colourful clothes were worn, as Mary's make-over of Fred began. He was happy to go along with it. It was not our place to protest about it, although looking back it tended to present a parody of Fred which simply accentuated the 'Space Captain' plotment that stayed with him for life – and became part of the media's take on the Universal Brotherhood.

The article suggests that while Fred and those like me who were managing Fred may have been ambivalent about the Space Captain image, it was nonetheless used in the publicity, as it both differentiated him from other 'gurus' and religious figures, and made for great copy. In a sense it was Fred's enthusiastic 'Identifiable Flying Object' focus which made him New Age – in line with other pioneers of the emblem – but just at the time the New Age discourse was shifting away from 'Space People' and prophecies which included extraterrestrial intervention.

The New Age Mission van is parked in the street outside the beautiful two-story house in Subiaco and upstairs, pacing the veranda, is the bloke they call the Space Captain.

"I don't know why they call me that," says Fred Robinson. "I never gave them permission."

But the title is carefully incorporated in his printed publicity and the 80 year old pop guru in the white beard is clearly not upset.

He believes in space people and space ships and that kind of thing and he is, in Australia, perhaps the leading guru, or teacher of the advantages of the Age of Aquarius, the super love age which has now been with us for nine years.

It will be with us for 2151 years more, a similar period to that enjoyed by the rather horrid Piscean Age which we have just endured and which Space Captain Fred would have us abandon before it is too late.

Fred Robinson lives with his wife in the hills above Armadale and they grow healthy and organic food and try to duck out of the way of the of the world's pollution.

He has just spent five months touring the eastern states and gathering a large following of the flower-powered and beautiful people who seem to like to flit about in robes and Red Indian headbands.

Fred, who is quite happy to regard himself as a rather swinging young man of 80, wears robes when the occasion demands, but he confesses a liking for a grey suit that is "rather nice" and "makes me look one of the responsible men of the community."

The guru in the grey flannel suit is quite certain that love, sweet love is the key to the dawning of the Age of Aquarius, but he is quick to detect a brightening of the eyes and issues a mild rebuke. "I mean love," he says, "You are thinking of lust."

Mr Robinson says that the beautiful people have shunned lust and are looking for an age of truth and beauty and an end to the Rafferty's rules system that ruined the Piscean Age.

He says it will take 12 generations of 33 years for the new age to reach its peak of lovemanship.

It will also mean the total evacuation of the earth's population while the planet is purified and re-balanced.

And how will it be done?

"They have spaceships, each capable of carrying hundreds of thousands of passengers at a time. But we will get the chance only if we have deserved it by our efforts."

There is no chance to question the existence of these spaceships, for as the Space Captain talks, an aide produces a book filled with photographs of mysterious shapes like soup plates and flashes them in front of our eyes.

"Here's the proof," he says. "Impressive, isn't it?"

Yesterday Fred Robinson drew a large crowd of young people to the Parkerville Amphitheatre, and he explained the advantages of the new age of love.

Musicians gave a short recital of rather mystical new age music played on a curious Japanese stringed instrument known as a koto.

The refreshments were confined to organic food and pure fruit juices and afterwards

Fred Robinson and his wife retired to their home in the hills.

“Why did we choose Armadale? We were led to it by my wife’s dreams. She kept

dreaming of a house with a pink ceiling, and that’s what we found at Armadale.

“My wife is out there on the balcony sleeping, right now. We lead our lives according to her dreams.” (Oliver 1971).

This was the last media article before the first group of alignees travelled to Noel Broun’s property at Carranya to put into practice the *Robinsonian/Oahspean* blueprint; and before a number of trips Fred (sometimes with Mary) made in the following years, where even more publicity was generated for Fred and the ‘working model’ established at Carranya, and later Balingup. There Fred’s general theories were selectively employed, while Mary’s specific day-to-day ‘guidance’ was less selectively followed. Both the formula, and the practice, of ‘*The Work*’ of ‘*Building the New*’ were now in place.



## Chapter 13: The Robinsons' Legacy to NRMs

Jacob Needleman, author of *The New Religions* (1970), regarded widely as a classic in the study of NRMs, recalls a conversation with the famous Jewish Scholar Abraham Heschel, during which Heschel dramatically exclaimed 'God is not nice, he is not an uncle. God is an earthquake' (p. 6). Needleman found 'earthquake' to be an apt description of the experiences of those who joined NRMs in California in the 1960s. As Daschke and Ashcraft remark in the Introduction to their documentary reader, *New Religious Movements* (2005):

'Earthquake' continues to be a useful metaphor for those attracted to various groups labelled 'cults,' 'sects,' 'emergent religions,' 'alternative religions,' or the term used in this volume 'New Religious Movements' (hereafter NRMs). People who join such groups have experienced an earthquake. Something has been shaken: Their understanding of family or other forms of human community, their sense of evil and suffering, their larger picture of the Cosmos and their place in it, or a combination of these and many other aspects of human awareness (p. 1).

This study clearly confirms the usefulness of the 'earthquake' metaphor in the lives of the Robinsons. Extending and particularising the metaphor, those who became part of the Shalam–Carranya Communities and the later UBI, depending on their closeness to the epicentre; the stability of their personal world view; and their ability to cope with emotional upheaval, were to respond to this 'earthquake' experience quite differently. Personal reactions to these seismic NRMs are dependent on a host of factors, including a mysterious sense of 'destiny' – of being part of a predestined *astrogeological* event bound to shake our ground and stir our universe.

Whatever the motivating factors for seeking and joining NRMs – and these factors are as varied as the individuals who seek to join – people in NRMs leave behind older and less useful ways of conceiving of themselves and their world because they have felt the earth move and sense that they must move with it or fall off the edge (Daschke & Ashcraft 2005, p. 1).

As with earthquakes there are always aftershocks to contend with. In the case of those who stay within the NRM quake-zone such aftershocks are likely to occur randomly throughout the participation period. Aftershocks are to be expected in an earthquake zone. On the other hand, for those who leave – having experienced an NRM quake – the aftershocks are likely to follow them for the rest of their lives. Sometimes they are shaken by anger expressed in 'anti-cult' recriminations (some of them perhaps quite

justified); and at other times shaken out of what could be called *soul-slumber*, reminding them of youthful ideals allowed to slide out of their lives. Lessons partially learnt during a youthful *NRM earthquake experience* can be revised, re-imagined, reconstructed and repositioned in ways that add to an understanding of the phenomena of NRMs themselves. This re-evaluation of the Robinsons' lives and the before-story of the UBI has led to some re-writing of the history of this NRM, and of the history of the Back-to-the-land and New Age collectives in Australia. It has detailed a number of shifts in the way that story was emplotted for public consumption – and on how it emplotted itself, selecting, endorsing, and transforming any number of otherwise disparate sources.

Rebuilding in a quake zone needs to take account of earlier quake-experience – assessing the forces experienced during the quake and (re)designing structures that can withstand similar, or even more powerful quakes. It is in this spirit of (re)assessment of the *NRM quakes* which had their epicentre in the Robinsons' movement and its Communities, that this research is undertaken. The point has been to provide information/answers to the main question at both a micro-level: understanding more of the Robinsons and the UBI; and theorising at a macro-level: gaining understanding about the formation and value of NRMs as part of the broader society within which they arise.

## **The Central Question**

The central question explored in this case study asks: 'What part do New Religious Movements and their charismatic founders play in the social milieu of their time – when viewed retrospectively?' One answer has suggested that they are the *avant-garde* of social change in a variety of domains, while another suggests they are bastions of anachronism.

The first part of the answer acknowledges that visionaries and the movements they start are rarely appreciated by the surrounding contemporary culture. The second part accepts that the 'truths' of the *visionaries* and *insiders* of such movements tend to 'freeze' their organisations, shutting out reasonable advice and healthy critique by *outsiders*. In this way society, informed by a largely sensation-seeking media, lacks any understanding of

what the group may have to offer. Instead, the group's perceived need to insulate themselves from the prevailing order creates an environment of suspicion. This makes it difficult to know what is really happening to insiders behind the closed doors of an organisation, and equally difficult for these organisations to ask for, or accept, outsider advice.

One thing has become clear in this extended inquiry into the early New Age counterculture which emerged around and was framed by Fred and Mary Robinson between the 1950s and the 1970s; and that is the degree to which their focus on an alternative and communal lifestyle was built around a distinctive set of spiritual values. These values represented the confluence of a number of successive layers of influence drawn from Fred's and Mary's past involvements and enthusiasms – aligned, at least in part, with the social pressures of the day.

It is this process of *framing* Fred and Mary Robinsons' story (via my own insider reflections and perspectives) which has been the focus of the study. As each biographical trajectory has been traced in turn, various intertexts, quotes, footnotes and commentaries have been developed to promote awareness of the social context(s) of the day, but also the spiritual and political beliefs behind this NRM – mostly drawn from very different social contexts. The study overall shows how changing contexts produce and push-forward changing interpretive and explanatory paradigms, and how institutions change in turn with the presenting of these paradigms.

Having tracked these sometimes subtle, more-often unsubtle shifts through the range of histories presented here, I want to conclude by examining the means of representation. It is important to track the ways the Robinsons' ventures have been presented, both as they developed, and subsequently – for it is here that cultural analysis enables us to see with the 'double-vision' of the student of history: part immersed in surfacing the records of the day, but partly in interpreting how, and why, that record selected and showed what it did.

This double-vision means that this final analysis will itself have to be sectioned-out, to take up the multiple emphases of what it has surfaced. It has become necessary, for

instance, to recognise the priority of the representations selected within each form of record – and so I begin this final analysis with a review of the impact of later representations of the Robinsons on what remains of their work. Only then can that work be evaluated in relation to its social, political, and even philosophical contribution.

Firstly then, this concluding section of the study examines and evaluates the impact of the various media reports about the Robinsons and their young alignees, on themselves; on the development of Australia's New Age activities; and on the Universal Brotherhood Communities they started in the 1970s. Secondly it attempts to summarise first the contemporary, and then the permanent impact of the Robinsons' role in the Australian apocalyptic, pioneer, New Age impulse of the 1950s and '60s, as it shifted to a more 'back-to-the-land' *spiritual* impulse in the 1970s and '80s. It also suggests how the Robinsons' legacy could be viewed today. Such simultaneously 'emic' and 'etic' perspectives can benefit Australian New Age studies by revealing the hidden genealogy of the Australian progenitors of New Age activities, augmenting, for instance, the work of Sutcliffe (2003) in identifying the genealogy of the Anglo-American New Age which was transmogrified through Findhorn (see pp. 112–122). To undertake this analysis however means examining the changing roles of media representation of NRMs and New Age forces within Australian society.

### **Media *Emplotment***

Media representations of Fred and Mary Robinson (and me as their living representative) have shifted, along with the cultural narratives prevailing at the time they were written. Paul Ricoeur (1984) used the word 'emplotment' to describe stories which are told according to the cultural and social modes and preferences of the day – stories that *seem* to be stable, ongoing and universal, but in fact may be quite different from the narratives ascribed to them. Atkins (2005) summarises the problem as one of 'mediation' of diverse proto-narrative elements:

Narrative emplotment brings the diverse elements of a situation into an imaginative order, in just the same way as does the plot of a story. Emplotment here has a mediating function. It configures events, agents and objects and renders those individual elements meaningful as part of a larger whole in which each takes a place in the network that constitutes the narrative's response to why, how, who, where, when, etc. By bringing together heterogeneous factors into its syntactical order emplotment creates a "concordant discordance," a tensive unity which functions as a redescription of a

situation in which the internal coherence of the constitutive elements endows them with an explanatory role (Atkins 2005).

Ricoeur himself notes the problems of producing coherent narrative, from a culturally ‘discordant’ moment: one in which many possible interpretations of an event or experience co-exist. There are just too many ‘meanings jostling for dominance:

It is true that this problem of cultural memory has taken on a new form in our day. The unmeasured richness and complexity of modern civilisation prohibits a single person today from encompassing the ancient past, foreign cultures, and sciences and technology in a personal culture. We now need a ‘polyphonic conception of culture where the parts, interacting but distinct, will be assumed by the one or the other, *diveris diversa*’ (Marrou 1955, p.184) (Ricoeur 1974, p 71).

The three electronic Appendices I have included as case studies reveal quite different ways the media were to emplot the Robinsons in the stories they produced. Two television interviews of 1971 represent Fred and me at the time of Fred’s greatest appeal. The final inclusion was made thirty eight years later – a retrospective that defines the UBI in line with a present day view.

- *Four Corners* programme (ABC 1971, Electronic Appendix 1).
- *GTK* programme (ABC 1971, Electronic Appendix 2).
- *Compass* programme (ABC 2009, Electronic Appendix 3).<sup>330</sup>

### ***Four Corners: ‘A New Breed of Farmers’***

This programme, partly filmed on the day I met Fred Robinson, investigates the ‘new breed of farmers’ which was the focus of the filmmakers. The programme is an innocent and open representation of the hopes of the late 1960s and early 1970s organic movement. The filmmakers enthusiastically supported the far-reaching vision of the interviewees:

**Narrator:** This way of life holds for them not only solutions for better living but great expectations that the way they live now will benefit those who will live in the future. What they achieve now in a small way may someday be achieved in a large way by nations.

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<sup>330</sup> See [www.fredrobinson.net.au/fourcorners](http://www.fredrobinson.net.au/fourcorners); [www.fredrobinson.net.au/gtk](http://www.fredrobinson.net.au/gtk); and [www.fredrobinson.net.au/compass](http://www.fredrobinson.net.au/compass) for full transcripts and in-depth commentaries/critiques of each of these three programmes; also see <http://www.scribd.com/stephencarthew> for updated versions of these documents.

The narration reflects the hopes of the participants, and is a sympathetic and almost wholly positive depiction of the movement, portraying Fred Robinson as the enthusiastic elderly statesman of a cultural movement which he is encouraging – rather than persuading. No mention of the word ‘guru’ is either made or implied; and both he and his ideas are represented fairly and vigorously, without the irony or the ambivalence the media adopted after Jonestown.<sup>331</sup>

**Narrator:** Organic farming and the concepts espoused by these people are not new. Rejecting organised society, they live an uncomplicated life. They plead the cause of simplicity and nature as man's only way to keep this earth habitable. In search of a new breed of farmer we discovered a new breed of people. They didn't live behind locked doors. They had none of the comforts of people who live in the cities. They worked from dawn till dusk without ever seeming to tire. They preach a gospel of love and truth.

The concept of the ‘new breed of person’ is a dominant theme in the programme. The filmmakers unabashedly focus on the positive values and actions taken by the adherents to the movement. The narrator clearly appreciates the dedicated demonstration of this ‘uncomplicated’ alternative. The filmmaker, looking to make an honest film, fairly represents the organic communal movement of the time:

**Narrator:** Through getting people together they hope that our world will change for the better. All of them find hope in the youth of today. All of them think that the world has to change dramatically in order to survive the problems that it is facing.

This filmmaker gives Fred Robinson, the first participant in the film, the final word in concluding the programme, clearly honouring his role as a figure-head and teacher of the mainly younger participants in the organic movement of the period.

**Fred Robinson:** The truth for the first time in the history of this planet is available to all who seek and ask, no matter what it is about; from pollution; the point of view of organic gardening; from the point of view of anything whereby man can make this a heaven upon earth instead of a hell upon earth.

Fred's stances reflected baby-boomer resistance to cultural norms in most areas, except for the drugs, sex and rock and roll. Fred's assurances that we needed to give up

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<sup>331</sup> There had been no connection between the Manson group's massacre (1969) and the alternative movement in Australia. Interestingly Fred himself sometimes used Charles Manson as a negative exemplar: ‘*If Charles Manson had been bought up from childhood by a loving family in a pure environment beside a bubbling steam, you may have heard about him as a great reformer, instead of a deluded deranged murderer*’. Fred had become an advocate of ‘nurture’, moving away from the more eugenics-mediated position he held before the Second World War – and which is to some degree supported in *The Urantia Book*.

excesses in these areas too, assured that there would be a very limited uptake of his message. While many young idealists flirted with Fred's *purity propositions*, relatively few took the plunge of making the personal changes necessary to experience what he was talking about through fasting and getting out of the '*pollution ridden cities*'. The filmmakers, aware that Fred's cosmic message would compromise his credibility in the organic farming domain, chose not to include his more way out propositions.

### **GTK's 'Space Captain'**

The second 1971 electronic media representation of Fred Robinson sees him in a much broader light than an advisor on organic gardening. The location of this televised interview was my 'Pine Grove' back garden in Bayview, Sydney. Filmed a couple of weeks after the *Four Corners* programme the interview was broadcast on the youth-culture series *GTK*.<sup>332</sup> The following examines some of this interview.

Fred Robinson and I are seen walking in the garden to the gentle sounds of The Moody Blues singing the song 'OM', the last track of the their 1968 Album *In Search of the Lost Chord*.<sup>333</sup> This spiritualisation of the interview even before it has begun strikes quite a different note to the earlier *Four Corners* programme, the 'New Breed of Farmers'. Fred is no longer an advisor on something as mundane as organic gardening. The cosmic questioning of the interviewer and indeed my own relationship to Fred, virtually announces him as the 'guru' he never wanted to be – and also the 'Space Captain' of the 'space cadets'. Later Mary would capitalise on this *Space Captain*

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<sup>332</sup> Between 1968–1975 *GTK* was produced at ABC's Television Studios at Gore Hill; Bernie Cannon who produced and directed the show had the view that all aspects of youth culture should be explored. He was 'out there' as his comments about the show reveal: 'Every Monday morning, rain or shine, this place used to explode. In 1971, I became producer/director for the *GTK* series. "*GTK*" meant "getting to know", and it was aimed at a youth culture, a youth audience, to inform, entertain and otherwise amuse' ([http://www.abc.net.au/dimensions/dimensions\\_in\\_time/Transcripts/s560023.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/dimensions/dimensions_in_time/Transcripts/s560023.htm), accessed 5.10.2009).

<sup>333</sup> 'OM' is a 1968 song by the British progressive rock band The Moody Blues. The sound 'OM' which is chanted repeatedly throughout the song, represents 'Aum', a sacred mantra in the Hindu, Jain and Buddhist religions. On the album, 'OM' is preceded by a short spoken-word interlude named 'The Word'. The mantra 'Om' is the lost chord referenced in the album's title, which concludes with:

To name a chord is important to some  
So they give it a word  
And the word is 'Om'

*In Search of the Lost Chord* may be considered a concept album because several of the tracks deal with the theme of a person's search for spiritual fulfilment and the search for the mythical 'lost chord'. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Om\\_\(The\\_Moody\\_Blues\\_song\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Om_(The_Moody_Blues_song)), accessed 5.10.2009).

theme, designing a sequined headband for Fred's well-groomed, pure white beard and long flowing hair to match – the look of a cool sage for a new generation.

By the conclusion of this song Fred has sat down with the youth who is wearing a trendy Tibetan shirt:

**Stephen Carthew:** Well, I've been doing the same sort of thing as Fred, for a much shorter time of course, for about six months before I heard about him up North. We got in touch and the very same afternoon there was a film crew coming out here to do a short thing about organic gardening – and so Fred was involved in that. Since then I have been working with him and organising his talks and trying to get him to as many young people as possible because he has information that is most valuable to them.

My comments here reveal the speed at which I had become involved with New Age activities. I was leap-frogging over my drug experiences, and then my mentors, to become an outpost for Anthony Brooke's Universal Foundation and for Peter and Eileen Caddy's Findhorn – seeing 'about six months' as quite long enough a period before taking on the role of Fred Robinson's promoter. It is interesting that at the end of this statement I speak in terms of trying to provide the service of getting Fred's information out to young people. I am already speaking as his partner in the New Age enterprise, even though it is just a couple of weeks since I met him. The Sydney Town Hall had not yet been booked.

**Fred Robinson:** To me there are two groups of young people: the irresponsible ones and the responsible ones. This message is to the responsible people of Australia.

This is an example of a *Robinsonesque* binary – the either/or positioning, and the extreme qualifications that so dominated his teachings. It is this black and white rhetoric that made his talks so unpalatable to most of the older generation – and so available to youth. Even in this early period of publicity Fred can be seen as urging the need for order and discipline.

**GTK:** What are you trying to tell them?

**Fred Robinson:** I am trying to tell them that they will not get the alternative way of life, which is essential now, without organisation – not being 'organised' – but doing it in an organised manner. They must know the principles of creation. They must *know* what it is they are trying to create, and go about it – not in a haphazard manner – but in a very, very orderly manner; and we are trying to bring order into their way of thinking and their approach.



**GTK:** A lot of young people are going to a commune style of living. It hasn't worked for them. How has it worked for you?

This is a very good question, especially since it hadn't worked for John Ballou Newbrough, at Shalam on the Rio Grande (following '*the blueprint*'); nor had it worked at ROTA at Browns Plains; nor in Northern Queensland where Fred had also tried to start a Community. While he and Mary were having success as a couple, on their somewhat self-sufficient five acres at Shalam, running a New Age Information Centre in WA, it is not true that it 'had worked' for him and Mary *as a Community*. The Community initiatives had never lived up to their hopes. The Robinsons had by now put all their hopes on the new *Aquarian generation* – the New Agers.

Fred didn't answer the exact question he was asked – he rarely did. He unconsciously fashioned answers to serve the '*needs of the moment*' as he saw them. Nonetheless it was an insightful answer:

**Fred Robinson:** Simply because they had not known how to bring in the new alternative society. They are doing wrong in that so many of them – a big percentage of them – are simply animated by a desire to escape from the existing chaos of civilisation; that is the main objective of a big proportion of them. They're ... Ahh ... how shall I put it ... they have no clear cut plan of what they want to do except to get away from the cities.

Fred's 'clear cut plan', as this study highlights, was based on the Shalam '*blueprint*' as outlined in *Oahspe* (1882) – but that rarely, if ever, appears within the public emplotment of either his own or subsequent media accounts; nor was it part of my own vision of the future:

**GTK:** What brought you to this sort of philosophy?

Turning now to me as a representative of the youthful audience of *GTK*, the interviewer has asked me a question that I didn't quite answer either:

**Stephen Carthew:** Just a greater understanding – seeing things from a greater understanding. Seeing things from a point of view that wasn't belief; wasn't speculation. For a long while I was speculating, believing and wondering and so on – but now I don't have to believe that I breathe – I know I breathe ... and it has nothing to do with religion. It's just a cosmic point of view.

Hearing my younger-self reflectively saying ‘for a long while...’ reveals something of the problem in this narrative. The knowing smile that came across my enlightened twenty four year old face, and the matter of fact way I shared my ‘cosmic point of view’ line, gave the impression that I thought I had nailed this question for all time – and for all comers:

**Stephen Carthew (cont.):** We talk about a counter-culture ... [laughing] ... and there we are in Glebe with fish and chips, smoking a cigarette in one hand and a joint in the other; and the whole thing is just a joke. It’s not a counter-culture at all – it’s just completely going with the old culture and sinking right to the lowest depths. We have to get out into the country, into a natural environment with pure water ... and ...

Here the editor cut me off, just as I was getting into full stride. I had moved the vision back into a known and increasingly mainstream discourse of the day.

The following question, coming as it was from a clearly already-engaged seeker, was the kind of question that Fred really appreciated, for it created an opportunity to make an appeal directly to the younger target audience, who in Fred’s opinion had the capacity to intuitively comprehend the import of what he was saying.

**GTK:** As far as you are concerned the people of the Aquarian Age, which I think started in 1962, are in fact a new people.

Bernie Cannon knew a fair bit about the Age of Aquarius, and with a New Age interviewer Fred was in his element. The spirit is flowing through him; and with a response rehearsed for thirty years, Fred comes across well. The subject is, after all, exceptionally relevant on a youth programme:

**Fred Robinson:** They are definitely. The way I put it is this. The old ‘human’ race. Spell it this way H-U dash M-A-N ... *hu-man*. In the old language it means ‘carnivorous tiger like animal’. Now then, the word ‘Mankind’ it means a Race of Kind Men and Women, who would never hurt or kill anything. The New Race belongs to the Race of Mankind. This is part of a Great Universal Plan – a New Race for a New Age, under New Conditions. I’ve been speaking for the last thirty-five years to their parents. This old generation were either quite incapable of comprehending the gigantic changes that must be brought about; or they were so fixed in their beliefs of the past. Fixed beliefs they thought were true!

Here Fred draws on what he claims is an ‘old language’, perhaps *Atlantian* or *Lemurian*, which he had no doubt read about in some obscure *channelture* which advanced both Vegetarianism and the ‘New Race of “Mankind”’. In the disengaged textual universe of

the media sound bite, such unreferenced claims seem scholarly and compelling. Fred Robinson's rhetoric makes a distinction between the New Ager audience he is appealing to and the bestial 'hu-mans'.<sup>334</sup> More established etymologies of 'human(e)' characterise qualities of kindness, mercy and compassion – at odds with Fred's 'old-language' definition; but what counts in a modern media clip is onward-progress, not careful scrutiny of the accurate use of language.

**GTK:** Well, I agree with you that the generation gap does exist. What you are trying to tell me is that there is no chance of changing it.

Bernie Cannon was '*on the ball*' as Fred used to say about people who could intuitively perceive and agree with what he was talking about. Fred eagerly jumps in to further expound on this subject: a somewhat delicate one, considering his own age.

**Fred Robinson:** There is no chance of changing it where the mass of the people are concerned. In the older generation there are individuals ... ah ... like myself ... There are many other individuals like myself, who have been aware ... I've been aware for forty years, since I was ruined in the last Great Depression; and that gave me the time to investigate. This is the word for the young people – for heaven's sake investigate!

The interviewer now turns to the question of the 'Space People'. This topic was the one that distinguished Fred from other teachers and gurus of the period – and unfortunately for the UBI Community, the one topic that would define it in the minds of the larger community. It was the media's favourite focus, always a major part of the emplotment of the Robinsons. Even though this subject was never the driving force or focus of the Community that evolved from Fred's teachings, from a journalistic perspective this topic was the most engaging, fascinating and amusing – and all at once. To a journalist this was akin to a miner hitting a rich vein of gold.

**GTK:** You mention Space People and things of this nature. Is that not a little remote from the way that...

Fred enthusiastically cuts him off before any more valuable time is wasted. He had designed his own rules of engagement with journalists. Over the years he had become as media savvy as those who emplotted him in their stories. Live television was Fred's

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<sup>334</sup> I have been unable to locate the source, but I remember Fred telling me at the time that this word 'Human' had been revealed by 'a reliable source': usually any channel that Fred believed had brought through the truth. See also footnote 222 and 223.

favourite medium, even when it attempted to define him within a limited set of topics. He was in response, highly competent in steering interviews back to his preferred issues.<sup>335</sup>

**Fred Robinson:** ‘Understanding’ is the key word for the Aquarian Age. We have come out of the Piscean Age, which was an age of ignorance which lasted 2,000 years. It was an age of darkness; a negative age; an age of many, many conflicting beliefs and opinions; an age of dividing people up into many, many opposing groups. ‘Divide and conquer’ was the motto. Well now, the Aquarian Age is the Age of Enlightenment, great knowledge is pouring into the world. Where from? The Space People – that’s where it is coming from!

At this point in the interview some strange, other worldly music-break was introduced, over a close up of Fred’s white head of hair and his hearing-aid; followed by a close-up of his Rosicrucian bejewelled Cross and his sinewy hands. The reflective break of about thirty seconds visually and aurally reifies and echoes the *blast-into-the-future* discourse that Fred had just delivered. It is an enigmatic climax – the audience can, at this point, either take the answer to the next question seriously, or read it as undercutting everything already revealed.

**GTK:** Where are the Space People from?

**Fred Robinson:** All parts of the galaxy. In spite of our scientists saying no one could travel the massive distances because they would all be hundreds of years old getting there, they can travel infinite distances in a very short time. We won’t discuss the technique here, but it is so.

**GTK:** For example flying saucers are one form of travel if you like ...

Once again Fred interrupts, excited by the enthusiasm of the questioner.

**Fred Robinson:** Of course flying saucers, in the main, travel inside the mother ships; they are the vessels they use when they come into the atmosphere of the planet; mainly that is what they are used for.

It was this mix of the New Age-environmentalist zeitgeist of the day with the ‘elder and sage’ appearance, later more fully developed by Mary, and the guaranteed *way-outness* of the flying saucer references which kept Fred Robinson in the media spotlight. There

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<sup>335</sup> Unfortunately a full half-hour interview with an Adelaide current affairs interviewer has been lost. It is believed to be the best media interview he ever did, causing a torrent of requests for repeating it, which it was – several times. But unfortunately we were too busy *building the new order* to order a copy at the time.

was simply no one else in Australia seriously suggesting such a full-gamut environmental, back-to-nature yet colourful, sci-fi proposition.

Between 1971 and 1977 Australia learned much of Fred Robinson and his Community. Depictions of Fred as a white-haired sage, and descriptions and images of the UBI alternative, back-to-the-land spiritual Community, the realisation of Fred's ideas and ideals, still live in the cultural consciousness of those who heard them, establishing archetypes of the spiritual community and the back-to-the-land dream. When such cultural tropes are revived however, their positioning within media texts reveals how far it is the contemporary context, and not the conditions of their original formation, which create their positioning for audiences.

### **'The Brotherhood' (Compass 2009)**

The following critique of a portion of a publicity foreword to the screening of 'The Brotherhood' on *Compass*, ABC TV helps focus the way in which the 'cult' stereotype emplots NRMs today. The socio-cultural nuance promised at the time of requesting my assistance and cooperation in making this program are inevitably suppressed by their dominant 'concordance': one which has achieved a ninety degree shift from those of the early 1970s.<sup>336</sup>

Laurie Critchley's film 'The Brotherhood' was promoted on the ABC website for *Compass* their weekly religion programme, in terms which at the outset seem positive:

*The Universal Brotherhood* was Australia's most celebrated alternative community attracting hundreds of young idealists who gave up everything to follow their very own New Age guru.

The discourse however is already descending into 'cult' shorthand. Fred Robinson did not present himself as the 'guru' for the Universal Brotherhood or to its members at any time. Both he and Mary Robinson made it clear from the outset that we should follow

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<sup>336</sup> The program was first screened at 9:25pm Sunday, February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2009. It is currently not on-line for viewing on the *Compass* website. However the transcript is still available at <<http://www.abc.net.au/compass/s2484490.htm>>. At the point of publication this production could be accessed online at via <<http://vimeo.com/31313241>> (accessed 21.5.2012). A line for line critique of this programme was produced in the months following the screening. This text was able to be viewed at the time of publication through <[www.fredrobinson.net.au/compass](http://www.fredrobinson.net.au/compass)> and for any further updated versions <<http://www.scribd.com/stephencarthew>>. Other texts that reveal my initial reactions to Critchley's film, including the full critique of the promotional text, are available at this URL.

our own conscience. No person was ever worshipped; nor was anyone ‘followed’ as such. The stereotypical *guru/follower* binary creates a narrative more immediately suited to the ‘cult’ image of NRMs within contemporary culture:

Now 30 years later they’re hosting a reunion to confront the sect’s surviving leader about the paradise they created ... and lost (Critchley 2009).

The reunion of UBI adherents was not organised to confront the ‘sect’s surviving leader’, but simply to catch-up with other past UBI members. Linda Moctezuma (née Ward), a past Member who had issues about her treatment just prior to leaving the Community, wanted to reconnect with me in a spirit of friendship. At the same time the Producer-Director, Laurie Critchley, contacted me with the idea of making a social history documentary on the UBI, for the ABCs respected religious television programme *Compass*. Linda and I initially conceived the idea of a reunion of Universal Brotherhood members to be held at her home in Sydney. The filmmakers’ need to create a gripping story of polemic between ‘cult-leaders’ and ‘cult-followers’, at the expense of verifiable facts, compromised the documentary. For instance, the Universal Brotherhood did not, as the film suggests, break up because of the schism which was the focus of the programme. The UBI continued for another decade. Then, like many such organisations, it came to the end of its life-cycle. The *paradise-found/lost* cliché is simply a rhetorical device – but one with consequences for future understanding of this movement.

The drive to represent an egocentric ‘cult leader’ as the controlling power of the group – in this case Mary Robinson with her right-hand-man Stephen Carthew – is essential to the emplotment of the New Religious Movements in the twenty-first century. Not to have emplotted the UBI via ‘cult’ models would have made the film out of sync with societal perceptions, and thus hardly a film worth making. The trope does however intersect with both Fred Robinson’s public persona, crucial as a promotional tool, and the influential ‘channelling’ functions of the Universal Link, and so needs a more detailed analysis of how far it influenced this particularly public NRM.

## Fred Robinson as an NRM Communicator

Fred Robinson saw himself as a lecturer and a repository of information rather than a mystic or channel. He was an oral teacher who responded best in front of a live audience or the ‘*sincere open-minded reporters*’ he was always looking for. He functioned equally well in one-on-one sessions, small home groups, on a public platform, or via electronic media – with a sympathetic interviewer. He rarely prepared a talk, consciously allowing himself to become ‘*warmed-up*’ or ‘*wound up*’ until he ‘*got into the flow*’, all phrases he used to explain his process of getting to a point where he knew that he was, in his words, ‘*allowing the spirit to flow through me*’. On the platform he saw himself as an ‘*instrument of Limitless Love and Truth*’, whose picture, as modelled by Liebie Pugh of the Universal Link, he placed on the table beside him with another framed picture – a long blonde haired male ‘Venusian’ going by the name of Orthon. Fred Robinson worked, to this extent, in the vatic or prophetic traditions of the inspired – albeit with carefully-calculated twentieth-century codings.

Fred was a humble and quiet, even unassuming man, who lacked confidence in a social situation – until asked a sincere question, at which point he would spring to life and become extraordinarily animated. He believed he had done the research, and collated the information needed to explain ‘*Modern Revealed Knowledge*’ to those who had ‘*the open and receptive mind of a child*’. Fred believed, although somewhat enigmatically, that he had been chosen by God to ‘*convey these truths to the advance guard of New Agers in Austral Aquaria*’.

For a segment of the apolitical and spiritually inclined countercultural youth of the 1970s the issue wasn’t so much about the details of *what* Fred said – his religious and philosophical positions; but more about *how* he said whatever he was saying, and the alternative cultural activities he promoted in ‘*practicalising the New Age*’. Fred’s media-persona became in itself an emblem of an authentic New Age message. His philosophies and prophecies became secondary to his presentation. The way he looked and the intensity of his ‘knowing’ were as convincing as his arguments – perhaps more so. Audiences of the day, supported by much of the media (especially the active alternative press of the period), tended to focus on Fred’s message that the New Agers

of the 1970s should ‘*follow their own heart-felt intuition*’ rather than engage with heavily theorised political commentaries or dogmatic texts. Mass media did not engage in the complexities of religious or philosophical argumentation, but they were able to present powerful images of conviction, and to integrate the various contemporary strands of ‘alternative’ culture into coherent (“concordant”) visions.

Fred, infinitely adaptable when it came to the cause, became an older version of the *voluntarily-othered-youth* – his own audience. Fred was in the parlance of the period, ‘an old cool cat on a natural high’. Mary had worked hard at Fred becoming more acceptable to mainstream society during the Shalam years of the 1960s, but now it served the cause for him to be seen as a genuine *wholesome hippie* of his generation (without the drugs and nudity). Fred gave spiritually and astrologically plausible reasons why the Aquarian New Agers felt so very different from their parents. He offered advice about a constructive course of action that could be taken. He – and more specifically Mary – organised the impulse of the day.

These ‘*revealed truths*’ and programs for a new life were somehow powerfully compelling when heard, rather than read in a leaflet or the press; and they held more weight when in Fred’s presence, than when seen on television or heard on the radio. The media’s major role from Fred and Mary’s perspective was that of encouraging people to attend platform meetings where the larger picture could be presented – and where Fred could, as he often said ‘*be a catalyst: that’s my own thing*’. Once Carranya had been established, the main reason for the face-to-face meetings was to encourage people to come and experience the *lived New Age* via Shalam, *the Training Centre and Prototype*, and then more extensively at Carranya, *the Fraternity and Working Model*.

Initially, dedicated *New Agers* would respond to the call and start a ‘*Fraternity*’, the word Fred favoured to distinguish the type of Community he was recommending from the drug mediated ‘communes’ he and Mary were so concerned about.<sup>337</sup> Some of

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<sup>337</sup> The most popular mainstream press descriptor of the times was the disparaging term ‘hippie commune’; Fred and Mary did not like the slovenly connotations of ‘hippie’, or the ‘Communist’ connotations implicit in the word ‘commune’. The terms ‘New Age Community’, ‘Spiritual Community’, or ‘Alternative Society’ were the preferred appellations initially, until the Universal Brotherhood was



Fred's 1971 listeners attempted to follow his principles and practices by themselves, and a few even attempted to start back-to-the-land Communities, which Fred visited. However most became unworkable within a couple of years – if not months. Aligned either abandoned their projects, or travelled to Shalam-Carranya to assist the Robinsons in building one strong, united Community. There was here both a politics of presence: a need to be near the source of the new knowledge, and a practical regime to be followed. As with many NRMs, these early Fred Robinson inspired Communities set out to enact the spiritual at a practical level.

### **A Politics of Presence: Fred's Newbrough/Oahspe Influence**

One crucial element that Fred Robinson as spiritual elder brought into presence for the New Age 'seekers' of the 1970s was a sense of contact with the many veins of revealed knowledge of the past – many of them arcane. With most of these original sources then unavailable to mainstream knowledge brokers, Fred's drive to re-surface and amalgamate such materials created the sense of a central, rather than marginal set of influences. In part it was this process, rather than the knowledge accessed, which operated to produce a powerful feeling of contact.

There are many reasons that could be explored in an attempt to understand for instance why Fred Robinson was so fixed on initiating intentional communities based on *Oahspe's* teachings in the 'Book of Shalam' (*Oahspe* 1960, pp. 809–830). The major driver may appear a random coincidence – but it is an indicator of how the 'contact' mechanism works within the 'concordant' logic of a NRM. By the mid-1950s it is highly likely that Fred Robinson thought he was *Oahspe's* author John Ballou Newbrough, reincarnated.

Fred could not ignore the fact that he was born on the exact day Newbrough died – 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1891 – for this would have been confirmation to him that Newbrough's Work was indeed destined to be his own.

Given Fred's metaphysical mindset, his belief in reincarnation (embedded through his 'experiences' with Ione Long), his reading of *Oahspe* with its accounts of Shalam and

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instituted, after which 'The Brotherhood' became the easiest way of referring to our own group. The word 'Fraternity', although often used by Fred, never caught on, for it was intuitively recognised as anachronistic.

the Children's Home, led him to believe that he was the newly departed Newborough. He believed that, as Newborough, he had volunteered to immediately return to this world without psychic gifts to finish the practical work of building a Shalam-like Children's Home, which he had been unable to complete in his previous incarnation due to his untimely death. Fred knew that Newbrough, only 63 when he had fell ill in a 'la grippe' epidemic, was not expected to die, and that strange spiritual phenomena accompanied his death:

For him, the labour of nursing twelve very sick patients [between three and four years old] when he could scarcely keep on his feet had been too much. His illness developed into pneumonia and on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 1891, he died.

A nurse to K.D. Stoes [the author], whom she described as 'a staid woman who took no stock in spirits,' alleged that she 'rushed out of the Children's Home in terror and demanded to be sent to Las Cruces when Dr. Newbrough died'. At his passing people huddled in frightened groups as strange noises, crashing, and swirling air currents filled the rooms. Floors and walls creaked and groaned, dishes fell, and furniture "walked" and toppled over. The whole fabric of Shalam shuddered as if in dire pain. 'Faithist foundlings, long divorced from any spiritualist credo, vouched for the truth of the strange manifestations and their fear as they clung to each other at night in their beds' (Stoes 1958, p. 109; in Priestley 1988, p. 34).

Fred Robinson, a significant member and celebrant of a Faithist congregation in the early 1950s, would have heard this iconic story. He had read about the 'Children's Land' as Shalam was named, and of the 'Seer of Shalam' as Newbrough was called (Priestley 1988, pp. 34–35). Using the name 'Shalam' for their property and '*Shalam Light*' for their Newsletter all confirms the importance of *Oahspe* in the Robinsons' schema. Continuity and the onward-flow of knowledge meant that Fred was very much interested in the trope of *baton changing*. He saw me, and the whole Membership of the UBI, as taking up his and Mary's vision: '*I have been waiting for you New Agers to take the baton from us*'. Practical signs of such continuity were important to him. *Oahspe's* dictates were never to be disregarded. Fred's seemingly irrational resistance to Mary's decision to allow 'flesh foods' to be eaten in the Community by those who were not thriving on vegetarian fare stemmed from the fact that *Oahspe* and its author/channel Newbrough were insistent about vegetarianism. For Fred, Mary's decisions were the thin end of the same *cosmic-law-breaking* wedge that had led to the

end of Shalam on the Rio Grande in 1907.<sup>338</sup> Continuity and purity of connection kept ideas powerful for Fred.

When later in the mid-1950s *The Urantia Book* was published Fred believed it to be the ‘*latest in Modern Revealed Knowledge*’, yet could not reject *Oahspe*. He placed both books in his little wooden box and set out to add to the work which he had started as Newbrough. Fred Robinson was a driven man, and the *Oahspe* blueprint was the driving force behind him. My postulation that Fred believed he was Newbrough in his past incarnation (something he would never have mentioned to anyone but Mary), makes sense of his loyalty to *Oahspe* and its *Shalamic* vision, despite his admission that it was an altogether strange book.

That Fred Robinson was the most influential promoter of *The Urantia Book* (1955) in Australia from the late 1950s until the early 1980s is remarkable, given the allegiance he held towards *Oahspe: A Kosmon Bible* (1882, 1891 and 1960 – the available version in the 1970s). Such distinctive duality of vision during the 1950s gave way to an eclectic plurality of New Age visions in the 1960s, during which period the Robinsons were to endorse a plethora of concepts put by a bevy of channels. All of this confirmed Fred’s credentials as a cosmic New Age teacher, seemingly free from blind allegiance to any particular book or ‘ism’ – a relativism that his 1970s audience found powerfully attractive. For Fred himself however, this was less about pluralism than integration. He never abandoned the view that ultimately, all would be revealed as interconnected.

## **A Second Presence: Mary Robinson**

Mary Broun-Robinson also combined New Age influences – perhaps too many for one person to absorb (covered in Chapter 6 Part 2 ‘Too Many New Age Influences’). What she brought however was an intensely practical orientation to their implementation. Throughout this study Mary has been recognised as the manager/owner of Shalam, and

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<sup>338</sup> After Newbrough died the US Shalam Colony marketed broiler chickens, having previously ‘adamantly refused to sell any bird or beast that would be slaughtered for food’ (Priestley 1988, p. 38). Fred’s insistence on vegetarianism as an ideal was to cause him much pain, as he made it a major issue in his relationship with Mary, who was equally certain that some Members, including herself, needed the easily accessible protein afforded by fish, chicken, and then later, red meat.

the force that melded the early ragtag troupe of Fred's alignees into a cohesive organisation, formalised as the Universal Brotherhood Inc. Community at Balingup.

The culturally relevant interventions in society made by the UBI would not have occurred without Mary Robinson. Some of these were ahead of their time. For instance her response to the growing sexualised culture of the 1980s, and its potential effect on children (see Chapter 6, Part 2, Moral Action Alert), are being addressed by the British Parliament in 2011:

The Bailey Review describes the plethora of explicit adverts, videos and television programmes as a 'wallpaper of sexual images that surround children'. Mr Bailey says parents are worried about 'the increasingly sexualised culture we live in' ([http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-13641451?utm\\_source=twitterfeed&utm\\_medium=twitter](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-13641451?utm_source=twitterfeed&utm_medium=twitter), accessed 6.6.2011).

However, like Fred, Mary Broun-Robinson combined pragmatism with religious excess. Having experienced Ogamisama's Temple of Peace (see Chapter 9, 'Soul-Polishing in Japan'), Mary took Ogamisama's disciplined ways as a model for her own leadership. An uncompromising disciplinarian of those who disagreed with her considered positions, Mary began to place too much store on her own dreams, visions and intuitions. While always trying to be reasonable, and wanting others to check her *guidance* in case she became erratic, she was nonetheless under the thrall of a belief in the value of that guidance. The following *Urantia Book* quote would have been useful to her – as it could be to any leader of an NRM: 'Religious persons must not regard every vivid psychological presentiment and every intense emotional experience as a divine revelation or a spiritual communication' (*The Urantia Book* 1955, p. 1000).

*The Urantia Book* makes plain the way by which those with religious/spiritual inclinations can assess their experiences. Those who claim to have religious inspirations are advised within a section entitled 'Mysticism, Ecstasy and Inspiration' to behave with restraint. The following is contained within Paper 91: 'The Evolution of Prayer'.

Mysticism, as the technique of the cultivation of the consciousness of the presence of God, is altogether praiseworthy, but when such practices lead to social isolation and culminate in religious fanaticism, they are all but reprehensible. Altogether too frequently that which the overwrought mystic evaluates as divine inspiration is the uprisings of his own deep mind ...

Religious ecstasy is permissible when resulting from sane antecedents, but such experiences are more often the outgrowth of purely emotional influences than a manifestation of deep spiritual character. Religious persons must not regard every vivid psychologic presentiment and every intense emotional experience as a divine revelation or a spiritual communication ...

... Unrestrained mystical enthusiasm and rampant religious ecstasy are not the credentials of inspiration, supposedly divine credentials (*The Urantia Book*, p. 1000–1001)

*The Urantia Book* suggests that all such visions should be submitted to pragmatic testing prior to their possible application:

The practical test of all these strange religious experiences of mysticism, ecstasy, and inspiration is to observe whether these phenomena cause an individual:

1. To enjoy better and more complete physical health.
2. To function more efficiently and practically in his mental life.
3. More fully and joyfully to socialise his religious experience.
4. More completely to spiritualise his day-by-day living while faithfully discharging the commonplace duties of routine mortal existence.
5. To enhance his love for, and appreciation of, truth, beauty, and goodness.
6. To conserve currently recognised social, moral, ethical, and spiritual values.
7. To increase his spiritual insight – God-consciousness (*The Urantia Book*, pp. 1000–1001).

While Fred was invested in the existence of an operational working model to prove the practicability of his *Oahspe*-inspired idealism, Mary was more immediately concerned with what was happening in the lives of those who came to the Community. Her approach helped to integrate Fred's *Cosmic Grand Narrative* with the inner universal 'laws of life' that Mary believed governed consciousness, and a life well lived. Her pragmatism – and her orientation towards discipline – are clear in *The Laws of Life and How to Live Them* (1964), Mary Broun-Robinson's most extensive compilation and exposition of these laws – written for a big purpose:

This little Text Book is written in readiness for a MASS AWAKENING. It is written as an explanation of what is happening, and what needs to be done about it ... THIS BOOK IS NOT WRITTEN TO CONVERT ANYONE ... it is purely and simply, a Text Book on what to do "TO GET THERE QUICKLY"; for once the Mass Awakening takes place there will be little time left for unessentials (Mary Broun 1964, pp. 7–8).

Mary believed it was her job to protect the Community and to discriminate between those ready and able to fulfil a role in it, and those who were not. Mary's *modus operandi* was formed by the cultural responses and models of leadership of the 1950s. The culturally inappropriate way in which she taught and governed too often worked

against the relativism and syncretism of the texts she and Fred worked to promote – yet without her work, little integration would have occurred.

### ***Shalam Light's* Relevance to the 1970s**

The Robinsons' monthly publication *Shalam Light* was altogether reader unfriendly – at least for most baby-boomers. I remember being quite uninterested in these magazines when they were presented to me on my arrival at Shalam, only occasionally reading articles in them during my seventeen years of association with the Robinsons. When I did read back issues of *Shalam Light* – particularly the reprinted channelled texts – I remained cynical. To me and others of my generation the focus of the Community was not the apocalyptically inflected *Space Peopled* New Age of the 1950s and '60s, and not the channelling of beliefs (always put as *truth*); it was about a personal and then communal response to the world – a response focussed on '*building the new, as the highest form of protest*'.

Since 'protesting' had become such an important issue for baby-boomers during the latter stages of the Vietnam War (1968–1972), referring to the building of our 'alternative society' as being the 'highest form of protest' had real currency. This phrase, which had originated at Findhorn, is not dissimilar to the Robinsons' own 'motto' expressed in *The Laws of Life and How to Live Them*: 'We are not here to combat the negative. We are here to establish the positive' (Mary Broun 1964, p. 24); nor is it much different from the Biblical injunction 'Resist not evil but overcome evil with good'.<sup>339</sup> The Robinsons taught that because 'resistance is a creative action' (ibid., p. 25) then it followed that 'what we resist we help to bring about' (ibid.); 'As Like attracts Like, your attitude draws to you that which you offer resistance to' (ibid.). These metaphysical 'truths' were not at that time popular or easy to process; the more simple idea of transmuting the 'protest' into 'direct action' – 'building' – proved to be more accessible to those attracted to Fred's alternative programme. Even those who had rejected involvement in organised protest as too belligerent and were instead focussed on meditation or drug induced highs, could identify with the aphorism 'the highest form

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<sup>339</sup> This was the Robinsons' version of Romans 12:21, 'Be not overcome of evil but overcome evil with good'.

of protest was to build the new'. This idea filled the vacuum left after protesting against the Vietnam War was no longer relevant in 1972 – the same year Fred began his overt 'recruiting' campaign for Carranya, the first Community venture started on Mary's son's farm near Coorow.

## **The Contribution of the Nimbin Aquarius Festival**

Another factor that coincided with Fred's pitch to baby-boomers was the Nimbin Aquarius Festival.<sup>340</sup> Fred was formally invited and decided to attend. The Carranya Community quickly mushroomed when Fred encouraged enough of the attendees to his talks to go directly to Shalam, to be trained for a new life at the Carranya Community. This "training" would include a supervised fast. For those who did not wish to continue a drug-mediated 'alternative' after the Aquarius Festival had finished, the Shalam-Carranya Community represented an organic, healthy life-style alternative. Given the distance, a surprising number were drawn to go West 'to clean up their act'. After the Vietnam War and the Aquarius Festival, a sector of my generation who were asking the spiritual and practical question: 'What now could be done to make sense of the world?' found the Robinsonian vision had a lot to offer – if their different paradigms could be negotiated successfully.

Had Fred included gymnosophy and sanctioned the smoking of marijuana in a more libertarian schema, I have no doubt he would have been an instant and phenomenal success; although the movement would have probably been more short-lived than it was.

## **New Age Channels and the Baby-Boomers**

The various attempts made by Fred and Mary Robinson to draw our attention to the knowledge of the 1960s New Age spiritual movements fell largely on deaf ears. In part this was an outcome of the self-consciously 'spiritual' language of the channelling of

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<sup>340</sup> The Aquarius Festival was a countercultural arts and music festival organised by the Australian Union of Students and sponsored by tobacco company Peter Stuyvesant. The first festival was held in Canberra in 1971, while the second, and last, was held in Nimbin, New South Wales in 1973. The Aquarius Festival aimed to celebrate alternative thinking and sustainable lifestyles. The latter – a ten day event – was held from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 1973 and co-directed by Johnny Allen and Graeme Dunstan. It is often described as Australia's equivalent to the Woodstock Festival and the birthplace for Australia's own hippie movement ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aquarius\\_Festival](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aquarius_Festival), accessed 26.5.2010).

the 1960s, which all too often reads ‘as if it might have been written by a computer program which has been instructed to produce variations on love, peace, goodness, mercy, sin, fear guilt and so on’ (Wilson, 2000 p. 249). Other than a relatively small section of *Oahspe*, and a much larger section about the life and teachings of Jesus as presented in *The Urantia Book*, Members were not much interested in New Age channelling that purported to come from the ‘Space Brothers or Sisters’, or the Ascended Masters in the Theosophical lineage, or any other occult source which had guided Fred and Mary into what they called ‘*The Work*’. While the recognition that such knowledge existed helped us feel that we were in the spiritual ‘know’, most of the texts which formed the Robinsons’ thinking were not something most of us wanted to study – and Fred Robinson had assured us that since it was now ‘*an action cycle*’, in-depth study was not necessary to be ‘in the consciousness’. Willingness to selflessly serve the ‘*the need of the moment*’ was the key criterion.

Fred Robinson’s apocalyptic scenario sat oddly with the main Community focus on building a sustainable and largely self-sufficient Community, in harmony with natural law, and, like Findhorn, directed by God’s guidance – as it ‘flowed through’ us. The paradox was overcome through Fred’s praxis; his plan for ‘doing’, that attracted both me and most of the people who later dedicated themselves to the UBI Community. Some who spent years in the Community never did accept key planks in the Robinsonian ‘Cosmic Viewpoint’. Time would ultimately reveal whether the world would end when Fred said it would. In the meantime we were doing something useful, in living positively and happily: ‘*The purpose of all learning is to be happy both here and hereafter*’ was an *Oahspean* ‘truth’ everyone could agree upon. Once again, in *Ricoeurian* terms, ‘concordant’ themes appeared to resolve discordant elements in the UBI’s belief system – particularly the unanimously held belief that we had no ‘beliefs’.

## **On Christmas 1967 and the New Age**

One extreme test of the apocalyptic prophecy central to the Robinsons’ formula for the UBI came with the 1967 end of the world scenario explored in Chapter 10. As Sutcliffe (2003) points out, ‘an entirely subjective and localised exegesis’ (p. 116) supplanted consensual prophecy of Christmas 1967 as the end of time. My generation, if aware of the details of the prophecies of 1967, had seen them as part of a process of *ramping up*



*the vibrations* of the New Age. Sutcliffe, quoting and critiquing a 1968 letter of explanation from Anthony Brooke of the *Universal Foundation*, details a shift of discourse that was taking place:

As the letter continues: ‘At Christmas 1967, the Earth reached a significant turning point. We enter 1968 with a new consciousness’. The mild phrase ‘turning point’ and the psychologistic concept of ‘new consciousness’ replace the passionate rhetoric of ‘great cleansing’ and a ‘Second Coming’ which we saw typified earlier discourse. An altogether more mundane and incremental series of changes in personal understanding and attitudes is implied in this modest language, which undermines the hitherto dominant hermeneutic of global drama and group salvation (Sutcliffe 2003, pp. 116–117).

As Sutcliffe points out, Findhorn Community had by 1971, and with the help of David Spangler, moved beyond the New Age prophetic mode of the veteran sub-cultural pioneers, to a position that was attractive to spiritually cognisant baby-boomers who were more interested in self-realisation and self-development. Sutcliffe epitomises the reformed discourse: ‘From apocalypse to self-realisation: the shift in New Age hermeneutics’ (*ibid.*, p. 114). If the Robinsons remained largely un-reconstructed, UBI alignee-adherents appeared able to ‘read’ the apocalypse in suitably Findhornian New Age and revisionist ways.

Sutcliffe traces the hermeneutical shift in the term ‘New Age’, noting that ‘by the early 1980s Spangler had acknowledged an increasing multifunctionality to the expression’ (2003, p. 128):

It can be seen as a vision of technological process, as a spiritual renaissance, as a set of strategies for personal and social transformation, as a network of individuals and groups implementing those strategies, as a state of mind, and even as a divine revelation ...Which is the real new age depends on the point of view (Spangler 1984, p. 36).

Spangler’s subjectivism is a new interpretation: ‘the idea that “New Age” might somehow be not “real” would have made no sense to the pioneers in the 1950s and 1960s’ (Sutcliffe 2003, p. 128). By the middle of the 1980s David Spangler’s confidence in the New Age programme (which he had largely set in motion) had been so eroded that he had been reluctant to allow the reprinting of his 1970s material (Riddell 1991, p. 79). By the 1990s Spangler frankly admitted that ‘to be called New Age today is the kiss of death, intellectually, academically, and professionally’ (Spangler & Thompson 1991, p. 31; in Sutcliffe 2003, p. 128). Spangler’s essay ‘The

New Age: The Movement Towards the Divine' (in Duncan 1993) introduces a metaphor that further and more clearly depicts his developing position:

Here is a metaphor that sums up my perspective. Christianity is like a great cathedral rising around a central spiritual and architectural theme. While it encompasses numerous denominations and sects within its boundaries, not all of whom agree or get along with each other, the architecture of Christian spirituality is unified in the Person of Jesus Christ, his incarnation, and his redemptive mission.

By contrast, The New Age is more like a flea market or a county fair, a collection of differently coloured and designed booths spread around a meadow, with the edges of the fair dissolving into the forested wilderness beyond. Where the cathedral may be a place of worship, the fair is a place of play and discovery ... One can be overwhelmed by the diversity of the fair, but also one can find new connections between old patterns and gain unexpected insights and revelations (p. 80).

'If I go to the new Age fair, I discover that it is made up of a bewildering variety of tents' says Spangler (ibid.), who goes on to list some forty of these from William Bloom's<sup>341</sup> New Age resource book *The Seekers Guide* (1992), designed 'to give an interested seeker an overview of all the activities, philosophies, teachings, and ideas that at one time or another had been lumped under the term "New Age"'. He notes that what links them together is that they either offer a challenge or provide an alternative to 'the dominant materialistic, patriarchal paradigm of contemporary Western industrialised culture' (Spangler 1993, p. 81). This essay retraces some historical elements leading to the rise of the 1950s and '60s New Age, such as Emanuel Swedenborg's prophetic influence on the English poet William Blake 'that the New Age would dawn in 1757, beginning with a transformation of consciousness' (ibid., p. 85).

What is important about this essay is Spangler's tracing of the shift he himself contributed to, and the effect of it on Australia's New Age pioneers the Robinsons and their Universal Brotherhood Community. I and other Members kept up a correspondence with Findhorn through the 1970s. Carranya traded regular newsletters, while we had visits from some of the new generation of Findhorn residents – all of which pollinated the Robinsons' movement with the latest strain of the *Findhornian*

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<sup>341</sup> William Bloom (1958 –) is a British teacher, healer and author in the field of holistic development. Bloom is regarded as a statesman for the Holistic movement on the political stage. He had the honour of addressing the UN Oslo Conference on Religion and Belief (August 1998) where his address to the delegates was instrumental in the reassessment of New Age and Holistic approach to spirituality, resulting in equal status being granted alongside the traditional faiths. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Bloom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Bloom), accessed 23.8.2011).

New Age. The shift which Spangler traces was coming into influence while the Robinsons and their young alignees were forming the UBI as a New Age Community:

The contemporary New Age began as a prophetic movement based on astrological interpretation of history that every two thousand years or so humanity moves into a new age in which civilisation is predominantly influenced by the qualities of the particular astrological sign that rules that age.

So, for the past two thousand years we have been under the sign of Pisces, now we are entering the Age of Aquarius. The movement was also fuelled by psychically received prophecies of the coming end of civilisation and, after a time of trial and tribulation, the beginning of a time of great abundance and peace. Paranoia about nuclear warfare all through the 1950s and '60s certainly created a climate in which such prophecies could flourish.

So the New Age is first a prophetic idea, and as such it presented a critique of modern Western industrialised civilisation as being too materialistic, too destructive of the earth, and too callous towards the needs of human community and social justice to survive. It was in this form that I first heard of the New Age in the late '50s (Spangler 1993, p. 85).

The above summation fairly represents the Robinsons' position, put to Australians in the 1950s and '60s. However a more Australian rather than American take on the New Age can be observed. The Robinsons were not just believers – they were doers, insistent on the need for creative action and cooperation with 'The Masters' in 'The Work'. They had lived as if they were 'ground crew' for the 'Elder Brothers/Space People', putting into practice the New Age as they *felt inspired* – and by following/adapting *Oahspe's* blueprint for a New Age colony. The New Age, while still seen as an 'event' to come, could not be just 'waited for' – the dominant American position – it was also something to be acted upon in the present. For the Robinsons, the New Age was not just about prophecy; it was about prophecy and creative positive action in the present. It was this dual positioning that made it possible for the Robinsons to engage the activist mind-set of the baby-boomer generation.

... as a prophecy the New Age was something to believe in but not something that offered a means of creative participation. That is, the Age of Aquarius would come whatever I or anyone else did or did not do. Western Civilisation was doomed for its sins, and while a better world was coming, it would do so thanks to divine intervention (or, in some prophecies, extraterrestrial intervention – UFOs have always been a part of the New Age subculture). One did not create a New Age; one waited for its predestined arrival (Spangler, 1993, pp. 85–86).

Spangler sees this position as resting squarely on the American millenarianism tradition, with the Aquarian Age substituted for the kingdom of God, and extraterrestrials for

angels, giving the prophecies a secular, scientised flavour that appealed to the gadget orientated American consciousness. Recalling the history of apocalyptic movement in the United States he considers the New Age idea ‘as American as apple pie and baseball’ (ibid. p. 86). Spangler suggests that if the New Age had remained simply ‘a prophetic idea emerging from the fringes of society’ (ibid.) it would have remained a marginal subculture and would have disappeared by the dawn of the 1990s. He notes there is ‘very little creative energy around waiting passively for something to happen, especially when time after time the prophetic events have not occurred when they were supposed to’ (ibid.). This was true too about Fred Robinson’s prophecies for his students of the 1950s and ’60s – they simply ran out of energy. I am certain my own generation would have had little to do with the Robinsons’ New Age message if it had been focussed predominantly in the prophetic mode.

Instead, the New Age found a more energetic lease on life by piggybacking on a number of other events that took place in the ’60s and ’70s: the civil rights movement, the drug culture, the hippie counterculture and the search for social alternatives, the antiwar movement, the rise of humanistic and transpersonal psychologies, the popularisation of Buddhism – especially the Zen and Tibetan varieties – and the new revelations and developments in science (such as the “new” physics), to name a few (Spangler 1993, p. 86).

While few of those instrumental in initiating these patterns of change had even heard of the New Age, ‘the transformational search to discover cultural alternatives’ (ibid. pp. 86–87) was symbolised by the musical *Hair* and its iconic ‘dawning of the Age of Aquarius’. The New Age was thus ‘loosed from its rather narrow moorings in the psychic and UFO subculture’ (ibid., p. 87) to become an image for an ‘array of exploratory efforts that both critiqued what was not working in the mainstream culture and looked for positive alternatives (Spangler, 1993, p. 87). It was the *cosmiccountercultural-catalyst-for-cultural-change* image of Fred Robinson that captured the imagination of my generation; not his prophecy, the Space People or the channelled texts he promoted. These were accepted as part of a much larger picture conceived of as ‘Fred’s message’. In a very real sense it was the synchronisation of Fred’s ‘appearance’ as a New Age teacher, with the discursive shift taking place in New Age hermeneutics, that led to the uptake of the Robinsons’ movement.

## Historical and Cultural Positioning

Discursive shifts such as these raise the issue of how, and how far, the various influences on the UBI fitted, or adapted to, their historical context. The social ‘loosening’ of the 1970s explored in Binkley’s *Getting Loose* (2007)<sup>342</sup> opened spaces for the aggregation of new social and cultural articulations – among them the unlikely amalgam of Fred Robinson’s politico-religious beliefs, Mary Broun-Robinson’s more conventionally moralistic communal goals, and ‘grass roots’ social renewal dynamics of the 1960s and ’70s baby-boomers.

The Shalam-Carranya Community and the Universal Brotherhood NRM, that were to evolve from the hybridised ideas and impulses at play, became a significant attempt to educate, publicise, lead, organise, formalise, and eventually to institutionalise the New Age in an Australian way; or as Fred Robinson liked to conceive it:

*To employ the pioneer spirit of Austral-Aquaria to the building of a working model of an alternative society based on the principles of the New Age, as example to the rest of the world* (Fred Robinson, lectures, 1970s).

The UBI was thus not simply part of a nebulous ‘new age collective’, that helped facilitate a ‘craze’ or ‘fad’, as in Sutcliffe’s sociological definition of the so called New Age ‘movement’ as a whole (Sutcliffe 2003, pp. 208–209). The UBI was both a New Age ‘movement’, and then a ‘colony’, that can be seen as straddling the *Pioneer-cataclysm-first-New Age* position of the 1950s and ’60s, and the *Findhorn-Spangler-cultural-transition-New Age* of the 1970s baby-boomers. The UBI was indeed what Sutcliffe describes as a ‘New Age colony’:

Although frequently upheld as the premier international ‘New Age’ settlement, Findhorn is better designated as one of very few colonies, perhaps the *only* colony, for which a sound case can be made for classification as ‘New Age’. In other words, the colony is an unusual form in ‘New Age’, and Findhorn features in the genealogy of ‘New Age’ *not* because the colony is representative of a wider type but because it is the particular historical outcome of a seminal ‘New Age’ group (Sutcliffe 2003, p. 210).

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<sup>342</sup> Drawing on the thought of Pierre Bourdieu, Zygmunt Bauman, and others, Binkley explains how self-loosening narratives helped the middle class confront the modernity of the 1970s. As rapid social change and political upheaval eroded middle-class cultural authority, the looser life provided opportunities for self-reinvention through everyday lifestyle choice (<http://www.dukeupress.edu/Catalog/ViewProduct.php?productid=11681&viewby=title>, accessed 5.5.2011).

Fred Robinson's New Age trajectory paralleled that of Peter Caddy (they had similar Rosicrucian roots). The Robinsons and the Caddys had much in common, from a common interest in UFOs; starting the Shalam and Findhorn ventures almost at the same time; followed by mutual Universal Link connections with Liebie Pugh. Yet they could also be depicted as at a tangent from each other via Fred's *Oahspean* New Age blueprint and *The Urantia Book* revelation. Both however can be seen as New Age colonies – the definition capturing their powerful blend of quasi-religious belief and politico-social communal renewal.

The UBI meets the full definition of a (New Age) Movement: engaged in the promotion of 'a series of actions or activities directed or tending towards a particular end',<sup>343</sup> (*Macquarie Dictionary* 2002, p.1251, meaning no. 8). Both the Shalam years (1962–1971, covered in Chapters 7–11), and the early days of Fred Robinson's public speaking to the baby-boomer generation, explored in Chapter 12, characterise a New Age "movement". By late 1973 this movement had clearly turned into a functioning and publicly significant 'organisation': 'a body of persons organised for some end or work'<sup>344</sup> (*Macquarie Dictionary* 2002, p.1349, meaning no. 6).

The Robinsons had to this extent done something remarkable – something that has largely slipped under the radar of scholars and commentators on this territory. They started a New Age 'Movement' and had established a functioning, live-in, New Age 'organisation' before the term New Age was in widespread use: about the middle of the 1970s.<sup>345</sup> As the only unaffiliated and recognised 'New Age Information Centre' in

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<sup>343</sup> In this case the very particular preparations for the "End" of the "Old World" ... and the "Starting" of a "New Age", however this might come about.

<sup>344</sup> In this case 'The Work' of building a model for a New Age lifestyle, in case of 'The End'.

<sup>345</sup> Widespread usage of the term *New Age* began in the mid-1970s (reflected in the title of monthly periodicals such as the *New Age Journal*, founded 1974) and probably influenced several thousand small metaphysical book and gift-stores that increasingly defined themselves as 'New Age bookstores' (see Algeo 1991, p. 234; and Materer 1995, p. 14). Key pre-1970s events raised public awareness of the New Age subculture: particularly the production of the musical *Hair: The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical* (1967) with its opening song 'Aquarius' and its memorable line 'This is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius'; and the publication of Linda Goodman's best-selling astrology book *Linda Goodman's Sun Signs* (1968), the first astrology book ever to earn a spot on the *New York Times Bestseller List* ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New\\_Age](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Age), accessed 17.3.2011).

Australia, Shalam became the authority on matters New Age in Australia during the 1960s (van Sommers 1963, pp. 205–209).<sup>346</sup>

*Shalam Light* had become Australia's established clearing house for unaligned New Age channels, publishing a raft of New Age literature from the USA and The United Kingdom from 1963 until 1971. In an embodied form of this activity of articulation of beliefs and influences, Mary Broun became Australia's New Age Ambassador, undertaking a pilgrimage mission of investigation and collaboration to meet the channels and experience influential groups first hand; going round the world via the USA, UK and New Zealand (see Chapter 7). By the late 1960s the Robinsons had produced their own compilation of beliefs and models for a communal life, in response to the accelerating social change of the era.

In 1967 the Robinsons toured Australia's eastern states on a 'last round up' tour, proclaiming the imminent birth of the New Age on Christmas Eve of 1967 (see Chapter 10). This generated considerable publicity which focussed on the question: 'Why are the UFOs here?' as the dramatisation or 'emplotment' of apocalyptic vision most common among New Age groups and NRMs formed in the *scientised* twentieth-century. Sutcliffe (2003) lists a range of texts which 'link spacecraft to an imminent "New Age"' (p. 84–85) and reveals Findhorn's close links with the UFO network of which the Robinsons were also part.

... it is significant that Findhorn's first residential guest ... was Daniel Fry, an American UFO contactee who claimed to have travelled in a spaceship (Caddy 1996, p. 236). To cement the circle, Ellwood (1973, p. 143) reports that the main ritual in Fry's UFO group 'Understanding Unlimited' was to recite a 'New Age' prayer derived from the Alice Bailey writings (presumably the 'Great Invocation') (Sutcliffe 2003, p.85).<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> In much the same way *Heralds of the New Age* (founded by May Harvey in 1956 in Auckland), spread the New Age message in New Zealand. Both 'brought together familiar elements of mediumship, healing, piety, UFO lore and a syncretic cosmology of 'Masters' and 'planes of existence' (Sutcliffe, 2003, p. 74). *Shalam*, like *Heralds of the New Age* was a 'seed group' run on a 'love offering basis' which 'sprang from a syncretic, lay culture' (ibid.). A cooperative and friendly relationship existed between these New Age antipodeans.

<sup>347</sup> The Great Invocation is a mantra "given" in 1937 to Alice Bailey by Djwhal Khul [an Ascended Master]. The mantra begins with "From the point of Light within the Mind of God, let light stream forth into the minds of men" with the rest of the passage reinforcing this idea of men acting in accordance with the plan of God. It is well known by many of the followers of the New Age movement, where it is used as part of meditation, particularly in groups (Melton 1990, p. 57). This invocation was used in the Findhorn Community (Sutcliffe 2003, p. 138–139) and was an invocation/injunction common in the New Age

Fred received *Understanding Unlimited* and had corresponded with Daniel Fry. Fred almost always told Fry's story about being taken for a ride in a flying saucer as related in *The White Sands Incident* (Fry 1954), while he also explained some of the extraterrestrial teachings from *Alan's Message to Men of Earth* (Fry 1954).

The Robinsons, being super-eclectic, were not bound by any of the sources from which they gleaned information. In 1971 Fred Robinson was able to adapt once again to the contemporary circumstances, becoming a New Age teacher of disaffected youth, many living in 'hippie communes' on the eastern seaboard of Australia. He stayed with the communards, observing 'the scene', teaching those receptive how they could follow his and Mary's example to '*live according the laws of life – Cosmic Law*' and how to set up Communities of '*Fraternities*' following *Oahspe's* blueprint (see Chapter 11 'Guru Fred'; and Chapter 12 'New Age Senior Statesman').

When interest in the 'collective' focused by Fred Robinson became strong enough to support major meetings in the Sydney Town Hall, the Melbourne Myer Music Bowl and the Adelaide Town Hall, a popular and well reported 'movement' with Fred as its figure-head had been established (Chapter 12, Part 1). From the media's perspective, Fred Robinson became configured as a 'Pop Guru', generating more than enough press coverage in both mainstream and alternative press (Chapter 12, Part 2) to kick start a youth movement based on a trendy combination of Back-to-the-land counterculture, and cosmic 'New Age' information.

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rituals of the 1960s and early 1970s ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice\\_Bailey#The\\_Great\\_Invocation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice_Bailey#The_Great_Invocation), accessed 25.6.2011). This and other Alice Bailey invocations were employed by the Robinsons throughout the Shalam years, and then used as the opening or concluding prayers at Fred Robinson's lectures to baby-boomers, and later as part of the UBI services conducted by me as a 'Preacher' and celebrant of the UBI. I had not read any of Alice Bailey's books. 'The Great Invocation', along with one other of Bailey's 'World Prayers' – a 'mantrum of unification' – were enough. Fred and Mary changed Bailey's prayer of unification from the singular 'I' to the plural 'We' to become a kind of New Age mission statement (a not yet gender neutral one):

The sons of men are one  
and we are one with them,  
We seek to love not hate  
We seek to serve and not exact due service,  
We seek to heal not hurt ... [first stanza only]

([http://www.worldprayers.org/archive/prayers/meditations/the\\_sons\\_of\\_men\\_are\\_one.html](http://www.worldprayers.org/archive/prayers/meditations/the_sons_of_men_are_one.html), accessed 22.9.2011).



By early 1972, only six months after starting his investigation of the ‘hippie communes’, Fred had begun a ‘*recruiting drive*’, sending those interested to Shalam, where they would receive some training before heading to the Carranya Community.

It is significant that at this point the Robinsons stopped correspondence with their *Shalam Light New Age (Pioneer)* network. All their attention was focussed on the new generation of Seekers – the New Agers themselves – who were literally knocking on their door in their keenness to start the kind of Community which both Fred and Mary Robinson had in their own way tried to bring about for the previous decade, but without success. With this powerful fusion of past New Age beliefs and current social impetus, now (re)cast as ‘New Age’, they had the material for a viable organisation.

### **The ‘Network’ Becomes Organised as a NRM**

Within two years the Robinsons and those younger people who had been drawn to The Shalam-Carranya Community had established a network of interested alignees in most Capital cities – with the help of a few of Fred’s older ‘students’ and friends of Shalam, and the unlikely assistance of the Quaker Donald Groom. This network managed and supported Fred and Mary’s promotional tours, which saw more people heading to the two West Australian Communities, putting the Robinsons’ New Age teachings into practice. When in 1975 the New Age, Back-to-the-land collective had become the Community of the Universal Brotherhood Incorporated, this alternative countercultural movement had become an overt religious organisation – a formal New Religious Movement. The year, marked in Australia by the overthrow of the social-reform Whitlam Government, mirrored the sudden return to conservative values which resulted. This NRM showed many signs of cohesion around similarly conservative values and behaviours, able to withstand the retreat from social experiment which marked the late 1970s. Mary Broun-Robinson’s otherwise discordant ‘moral’ influences may have extended the life of this New Age Colony.

By 1976 many of the links with the ‘countercultural collective’ still ‘*playing with drugs and free sex*’ were breaking down, and it was absolutely clear where the UBI stood on these issues. Fewer people ‘rocked up’ to ‘check out the scene’. At the same time the Community’s move to Balingup at the end of 1975, and its ‘incarnation’ as a

New Religious Movement saw it quickly become popular with local and Australia-wide press. The UBI's clean cut lifestyle, productive farm and popular entertainment skills, along with Fred's colourful image, all made for good media copy, but also a happy relationship with the local community. Even the rise of negative 'cult' headlines about the UBI (mainly interstate) during this period did little to damp local press enthusiasm for writing about the group in a positive manner.

What ultimately failed the UBI was its internal organisational structure, rather than its public reputation. The Community had adopted a 'new' yet also traditional, theocratic and hierarchical leadership model that was never going to work over the long term. A schism in the Community in 1977, inevitable in an adaptive and conceptually eclectic formation, halved its numbers, even if it made those who stayed stronger and the group more stable, and with less strain on its inadequate infrastructure.

These internal adjustments were exacerbated by the attitudinal shifts within mainstream Australian society. The UBI lost much of its enthusiastic youthful dynamism. By 1982 the Community had received a grant from the Federal Government to build a school building on the property, a significant return to officially sanctioned social inclusion. When Fred Robinson died in 1983 the group was hardly affected; in fact thrived on his posthumous image, without having to contend with his more contentious ongoing public prophecies. Other more difficult acculturation issues were more troubling.

By the mid-1980s the UBI faced the challenge of educating its few high school children, while running a primary school for Steiner Education – which had been made open to the public.<sup>348</sup> When in 1986, leading members of the Community registered the Balinga Valley School as a separate legal entity, a conceptual split occurred around education issues and priorities: the value of the school as a local community service, versus the UBI Community itself as a 'world-transforming movement' in the full Robinsonian conception.

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<sup>348</sup> Waldorf Education (also known as Steiner or Steiner-Waldorf education) is a humanistic approach to pedagogy based upon the educational philosophy of the Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner, the founder of Anthroposophy. Learning is interdisciplinary, integrating practical and artistic ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Art\\_education](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Art_education), accessed 17.3.2011).

By the time Mary Robinson died in 1989 most of the foundation members had left, and those that stayed were irrevocably split, sometimes on issues difficult to define. Virtually no one wanted to return to sustaining the original concepts. A new and amended eco-village constitution allowed for the survival of the group as a registered association, the name Universal Brotherhood was formally changed to Brooklands Community in 1994, representing a group which remains to this day with about half-a-dozen ex-members of the UBI.

## **The Argument**

It is the re-threading of the influences on the formation of the UBI, and of the UBI beliefs with practical social programs, which creates a *contextualised* explanation of the NRM. Without such multi-sourced analysis, no explanation is possible. Now it becomes possible to see how NRMs engage their culture – and how such initiatives could, and likely will, happen again.

It is useful to reflect on the shifts in focus and social functioning from the time Fred Robinson met Mary Broun in the early 1960s: from Fred Robinson (himself) as a New Age Information Centre → to Shalam as a recognised New Age Information Centre and ‘prototype’ New Age Community → to a *Robinsonian* New Age Movement able to engage Australia’s baby-boomer back-to-the-land countercultural collective → to an organisation establishing the Shalam-Carranya Community/ Brotherhood, a hybrid *organicosmic* countercultural New Age Colony → to the Universal Brotherhood Incorporated, a New Age Colony and formal New Religious Movement → to the secular and acculturated Brooklands Community, an eco-village which has become absorbed into the local Balingup community.

Here it is important to focus on the three major trajectories that formed the group: as an Intentional New Age Community; as an organised New Age Movement; and as a New Religious Movement Community.

## The UBI as an Intentional Community

The Robinsons' movement of the early 1970s and the later UBI have become a silently embedded, largely forgotten influence on the 1970s communal Back-to-the-land movement.

The introduction to Michael Green's article, 'Down to Earth' (*The Big Issue*, 4<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> January, 2011, pp. 14–17)<sup>349</sup> states: 'Communes are back. Actually they never went away. Michael Green discovers they've shaken the naked-hippie image to offer a practical alternative to modern challenges' (p. 14). The article is instructive, focussing first on Phil Bourne, who for 24 years has been living in a small community-living project named Commonground in Seymour, 100ks north of Melbourne. Bourne describes communal life as 'a high-input, high-reward lifestyle' (ibid.), while Green suggests 'the old guard of communal dwellers have been sensing that people are, once again, beginning to see value in their way of life' (ibid., p. 15). In substantiating this theory, Green continues to quote Bourne, who employs *neo-hippie/New Age* vernacular: '...we're convinced there is a new energy around' (Bourne, in Green 2011, p. 15). Mary Robinson spoke of a 'wholesome' (as well as 'holistic') 'new energy' that would be available to those who were able to shake off the 'naked-hippie' practices of the late 1960s and early '70s.

Revisiting the same theme which motivated a sector of the baby-boomer generation in the early 1970s, Bourne continues: 'People are looking at what's happening in the world and they're hungry to find other options' (ibid.). Recalling the inspiration of those times as '... New Age and simple living ideas, together with concerns about spiking oil prices, environmental degradation and limits to economic growth' (ibid.), Bourne admits that 'the intentional communities of the '60s and '70s had a lot of good intentions but the application was vague' (ibid.). While the UBI was not at all vague about 'good intentions', specific in its plan for an alternative which was both healthy and drug-free, it was still open to various types of stereotyping that worked to limit the credibility of the movement as a whole. As Green's article points out, 'In many ways, it was

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<sup>349</sup> This article is also available online (<http://michaelbgreen.com.au/communitydevelopment>, accessed 22.9.2011).

downtrodden by the mainstream as hippie nonsense – a percentage of which had truth to it and a percentage of which missed the point’ (ibid.). The frustration which ensued caused the messages to become more and more strident. Even spiritual channelling – wherever it came from – can be seen to be full of frustration at a society which had ‘missed the point’ of the need to make major changes.

Green turns to an exploration of the Homeland Community near Bellingen. Unaware that its founders were first inspired by Fred and Mary Robinson and the UBI, Green sees it as ‘being modelled on the Findhorn Foundation’, but noting that ‘the connection vanished in the early 1980s as the overseas philosophy became obscured by a haze of marijuana smoke closer to home’ (Green 2011, p. 15). The Robinsons had warned the founders of Homeland that without making a straight-forward rule banning drugs, their dreams would be unlikely to materialise. Some values however had prevailed.

Dr. Bill Metcalf, introduced as ‘a “communitarian” scholar from Griffith University’ (ibid.) comments, ‘You don’t get naked hippies running around the hills anymore ... a lot of people see community living as a very sensible option’ (Metcalf, in Green 2011, p. 15). Metcalf effectively both secularises and normalises the current day expression of Intentional Communities:

They aren’t looking at it in the utopian sense – it’s just a much more sane way to live in a rural area. The interest is moving to another strata of society that wouldn’t have considered it 20 years ago, because it was seen as too outrageous (ibid.).

Metcalf, working on an encyclopaedia of Australian Intentional Communities established prior to the baby-boomer generation, expected the undertaking to be brief, but discovered a rich history of such Communities:

I keep finding new ones faster than I can research them. In every state there are amazing examples: there are lesbian separatist communes from the 1870s, groups who believed in single tax, nudist groups, vegetarians. You name it they’re out there (Metcalf, quoted in Green 2011, p. 16).

Green comments on the changes made in the two communities he investigated: ‘Just as the kinds of communities and structures change over time, utopian dreams are also tempered from within’ (ibid.). As this study has shown, even within a seemingly strictly regulated Community there is constant adaptation to social and cultural change.

## **On the UBI as a ‘New Age’ Movement and Organisation**

The Robinsons were the most influential representatives of any unaligned New Age movement in Australia during the 1960s; and Fred Robinson had already established himself as a *walking-talking-new-age-information-centre* during the 1950s and early 1960s (see Chapter 5, Part 4: ‘Fred the Wandering Sage’). Synchronicities and cross-purposes between pioneer New-Agers like the Robinsons, born before (or between) the Wars, and the countercultural New-Agers, born after World War II, indicate a complex grid of aligned goals and cultural differences. Both had largely rejected orthodox religious views and the idea of Biblical or theological correctness. Both had moved beyond a need to follow prescriptive religious practices, no longer believing in salvation via ritual. This New Age freedom was hard won amongst early pioneers, many of whom had been involved with esoteric occult training.

The move away from formally established esoteric occult groups like the Rosicrucians is the point at which the New Age established itself as eclectic and exoteric. Founding pioneers of the New Age – people like Fred Robinson and Peter Caddy – had been taught by innovators of the ancient Rosicrucian traditions. Fred had experienced earthquake-like ‘training’ when he left his family, influenced by Parcaë and Ione Long’s gymnosophical Rosicrucian Order of the Aquarians (ROTA), with anonymous help from Max Heindel’s Rosicrucian Fellowship; while Peter Caddy had taken instruction from George A. Sullivan (1890–1942) who had started a chapter of the Rosicrucian Order Crotona Fellowship in Liverpool in the 1920s, and was active in the intersecting occult networks of the time (including Theosophical and Co-Masonic circles) (Sutcliffe 2003, pp. 41–45). That these two pioneer New Agers were able to drop the secret rites and ceremonies of their Rosicrucian sects to freely share the ‘essence’ of these teachings is testimony to the coming of a new age. Openness, eclecticism and exotericism were hallmarks of the ‘New Age’ presented to the baby-boomer countercultural generation of the early 1970s. As in Binkley’s trope for the 1970s such ‘loosening’ of both belief structures and sacramental practices by the pioneer New Agers provided congruence with the countercultural New Agers. But while there was much in common within Pioneer New Age circles, and between the Pioneers and the countercultural baby-boomers, there were also marked differences.

## **'Feelings' and 'Impulses' as 'New Age' Markers**

The way 'feelings' were responded to by some of the Pioneer New Agers and Countercultural New Agers was a cause of conflict; there was for instance a marked difference in the attitude towards *following one's feelings/intuitions* between Findhorn and the Universal Brotherhood. Mary Robinson knew where she stood in regard to the difference between 'conscience' and 'feelings'. Although she knew little about the earlier personal lives of Peter and Eileen Caddy she suspected that they had fallen, much like Fred, for all sorts of spiritual excuses for *'doing the wrong thing'*.

Both Robinson and Caddy were masters at breaking the cultural taboos of their time. Fred, as we have seen, abandoned his family to join ROTA – an establishment which, in the eyes of the world, was nothing but a 'nudist camp'. Peter Caddy felt 'guided' to win the heart of Eileen, then married to Andrew Coombe, a fellow RAF officer, friend and Moral Re-Armament enthusiast. A glimpse into the Caddys' intriguing love story shows how Peter Caddy broke a range of taboos to win Eileen for the supposedly high purpose of 'The Work'. Caddy relates an incident in the lead up to his relationship, and later marriage, to Eileen. Mary Robinson would never have approved, seeing it as reprehensible, especially as the way Caddy tells the story makes it appear that he is not only unrepentant but proud of his planned seduction of Eileen – and in the name of God's plan:

...'I'm sorry, Peter, I can't,' she replied. 'Besides we are both married and I have five children.' Well, we talked nearly every day for the next ten days and she still didn't want to see it, but I knew it was so ...

While walking along the beach one day, I was full of inspiration as to what would happen when the two halves were brought together. It would not only be balance of male and female, but of Light and Love, mind and heart, intellect and intuition, action and being. I was very excited by this revelation, and shared my thoughts in a sixteen page letter to Eileen; I enclosed a large number of photographs I'd taken of her family as a covering excuse. I wanted to get it to her without the embarrassment of Andrew seeing the letter, so I gave it to an officer from Habbaniyah who was visiting the Canal Zone. I asked that he hand it personally to Mrs Coombe only. Andrew was away in South Africa and hadn't returned yet; I further made sure he wasn't on the passenger list of the same aircraft as the officer flying back to Habbaniyah.

As it happened, Andrew *was* on that plane – he flew as supernumerary crew and therefore his name did not appear on the passenger list. The idiot of an officer gave this thick letter to Andrew to give to Eileen. When Eileen received it, she was so terrified and embarrassed that she hastened to the bathroom, where she quickly read through it, tore it into small pieces and flushed it down the toilet – an untimely end for an inspired letter (Caddy 1995, p. 109).

The moral strictures and mores of the times, to say nothing of ‘fair play’ between brother officers, were abandoned to Caddy’s ‘feelings’ – construed as ‘spiritual guidance’. Stories about some of these New Age pioneers (especially the males), suggest that irregular relationships in the name of ‘guidance’, ‘karmic links’, ‘twin souls’ and ‘soul mates’ were prevalent. Sutcliffe sums up the story of Sheena Govan’s group<sup>350</sup> (from which sprang Findhorn) with the following insight:

Notwithstanding the preoccupation with spirituality and the ‘Christ within’, it is difficult to miss a highly visceral, sexually and emotionally charged dimension to the group (see Caddy 1995, pp. 77–80). What would certainly have been considered in the early 1950s an epidemic of challenging sexual morality and transgression of women’s ascribed gender roles in particular – Sheena’s illegitimate child and multiple relationships, Peter’s serial marriages, Eileen’s abandonment of her first husband and children, Peter and Eileen’s co-habitation, Dorothy’s<sup>351</sup> divorce and independence – only anticipated the cocktail of sex and spirituality just around the corner in the ‘Swinging Sixties’ (Masters, 1985) (Sutcliffe 2003, pp. 60–61).

The ‘feeling-following’ of these New Age pioneers was in stark contrast to Mary Robinson’s ‘conscience-following’. Her adherence to moral standards and strict 1950s social mores was very much intact. Mary wanted to improve on community and personal moral standards, not have them ‘loosened’, as in Binkley’s (2007) trope for the 1970s. *Contrary Mary* was quite prepared to stand against popular trends which she deemed were *not of God*.

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<sup>350</sup> Sheena Govan (1912–1967) was an informal spiritual teacher, and the daughter of evangelist John George Govan. Later in life she became an early influence on what would become the Findhorn Foundation. Her career demonstrated some of the links between Evangelicalism and early New Age thought ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheena\\_Govan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheena_Govan), accessed 20.3.2011).

<sup>351</sup> Dorothy Maclean (1920 –) was the third cofounder of Findhorn. A Canadian graduate in Business Studies, she had met Govan in New York during the Second World War and been involved in Theosophy, Anthroposophy, and Alice Bailey (Sutcliffe 2003, p. 58). Maclean is known for her work with *devas*, which here means the intelligences overseeing the natural world. Her book *To Hear the Angels Sing* (1980) gives an overview of this work. A full-length autobiography, *Memoirs of an Ordinary Mystic* (2010) was published by the Lorrain Association ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dorothy\\_Maclean](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dorothy_Maclean), accessed 20.3.2011).



During the 1980s, through my association Father Bernie Dwyer, all the married members of the UBI did a Marriage Encounter program.<sup>352</sup> Their aphorism, ‘Love is not just a feeling it is a decision’ cemented the strong line Mary had taken, but giving it a more loving and caring human face. The UBI followed traditional nuclear family models – with Mary keeping a watch-out for any hanky-panky. There were few infidelity problems within UBI ranks. This was not the case at Findhorn, and there wasn’t a lot Peter and Eileen Caddy could say, given their own histories. When they came to visit the UBI in 1978 they could see the value in the UBI *moral-model*; and Mary was constantly pushing them to adopt something similar. In Mary’s mind, the UBI was handling things better in this domain of life; so while appreciating Findhorn’s contributions and faster development, she felt the ‘true’ New Age ideal was to strengthen and fortify the conscience. Had she known the full Caddy story she would have been decidedly unimpressed.

One other identifying feature that played into the New Age of the 1970s was that of following intuitions immediately and without questioning. The following story, again from Peter Caddy (1996), outlines two issues: firstly a conscious ‘training’ in the development of faith in one’s own intuitive impulse, assuming it is ‘God’s guidance’; and secondly, the way in which statements from New Age and NRM ‘teachers’ (Govan in this case) are seen as providing ‘lessons’, even if proven untrue.

One evening, when the three of us were out to dinner in a London restaurant, Eileen caught a glimpse of what I had been through in my training with Sheena. We had eaten a delightful meal and were now sitting in the lounge enjoying our coffee. Halfway through my cup, I had a sudden inner prompting to go and see Jack, the naval commander, who lived nearby. I leisurely finished my coffee and stood up, saying to the others ‘I’m just off to see Jack, I’ll be back shortly’. I walked around the corner to the block of flats where Jack lived, and to my amazement the hall porter told me I had just missed him by a few seconds. Sheena was very angry with me when I returned to the restaurant and told them what had happened. ‘Jack had a revolver,’ she said, ‘and while you were sitting there finishing your coffee, he went off to commit suicide!’ She railed at me for not following my inner prompting *immediately*; because I had waited to enjoy my coffee, Jack was now *dead*. Eileen was shocked and I felt terrible, about three inches tall. As it turned out Jack didn’t kill himself, but I had to believe at the time that he did, in order to have the lesson rammed home: *always act on inner prompting immediately* (Caddy 1995, pp. 114–115).

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<sup>352</sup> Marriage Encounter (M.E.) is a religiously-based weekend program designed to help married couples improve their marriage, grow closer to each other, and improve commitment to each other. Originally a Catholic marriage renewal program, Marriage Encounters is now offered by a variety of Protestant, Jewish, as well as Catholic faith expressions. Most of them are open to couples of any or no religious persuasion ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marriage\\_Encounter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marriage_Encounter), accessed 20.3.2011).

I initially followed Caddy's spontaneous 'inner prompting idea' by hiring the Sydney Town Hall and the Myer Music Bowl – twice.<sup>353</sup> Later I bought unnecessary items of furniture for the fledgling Carranya Community. My, *a la* Peter Caddy, justification: 'I had strong guidance and was acting on it immediately', did not impress either Mary or Fred, who were both frugal. They simply saw this as a self-indulgent spendthrift trait, which I would do much better without. The Robinsons were not influenced by Caddy's cavalier approach, or the *Findhornian* insistence on perfection: 'Nothing but the best will do for God'; and 'Go ahead in absolute faith and expect the funds to come in perfect timing'. Mary and Fred adopted a very different approach: 'Make the best of what you have', and 'Never buy anything you can't afford – never go into debt'.

Issues such as these defined the shift from the Robinson's UBI being seen as New Age to it being seen as a religious 'organisation' (sociologically speaking a New Religious Movement). The Robinsons' attempt to institutionalise their version of New Age tenets for a number of New Age Communities aligned with the UBI was successful only to an extent, and for a short period.

The 'New Age collective' in Australia had no real interest in being formalised and organised – for it had no agreed tenets. As in Spangler's trope New Age denoted a 'tented fair' of which the Robinsons was simply 'one stall'. To the Robinsons the New Age was a Christ-conscious Mega-Cathedral that dwarfed all previous religious and philosophical architectural attempts – however, try as they might, they could not convince the mass-consciousness to this view. Therefore the UBI did what it could in its own small way, becoming a new religious movement with New Age leanings. As a New Age group the UBI can be assessed as restrictive; as a New Religious Movement it can be seen as open and free.

### **The UBI as a New Religious Movement**

The UBI was not much concerned with *orthopraxy* ('correct' religious rituals and practices); nor did it demand *orthodoxy* (a standardised and 'correct' religious theology and belief system). Yet although there was relative freedom in the above areas, the

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<sup>353</sup> I had run out of my father's assurance windfall before I hired the Music Bowl for the second time. I tried to skip the payment of this bill, leaving for Perth without a forwarding address. Mary heard about this and insisted that I fulfil my obligation. It took me nearly two years, working part-time in a chipboard factory, to pay for my 'inspired' decision.

group did call for a high degree of *orthopassy* ('correct' feelings and attitude). This attempt to homogenise emotional reaction and outward practical and expressive responses to inner impulses and attitudes was similar to both the Evangelical/Pentecostal and *Positive Thinking* versions of Christianity, which were being popularised at the time the UBI was in its ascendancy. As Bouma observes, 'It is not acceptable to express unhappiness in a Pentecostal assembly. Sadness, grief and guilt are but momentary transitional feelings on the way to ecstasy and praise' (2006, p. 94).

One of Fred Robinson's favourite sayings: 'The purpose of life is to be happy both here and hereafter', was taken too literally in the UBI, leaving unhappy memories for some ex-members, who felt that 'happiness' was being legislated and demanded. *Micro-canon* laws, and a communal pressure to be 'in the consciousness' were enigmatic restrictions to many, while a somewhat nebulous requirement of being *in-line* with the values of the Community introduced both misunderstandings and resentment. Does this then build, as Black (1984) hypothesised, a seemingly inevitable decline into 'cult' status? Such a view, this study suggests, may have as much to do with the overall change in cultural perspectives on NRMs, than with empirical evidence for system-wide or universal tropes of organisational decline.

In retrospect the UBI's orthopassy can be seen to have produced counterfeit feelings and responses directed to being of 'one-harmonious-mind', or being part of 'the group consciousnesses'. Such conceptions, when considered in concert with the sacred task of 'choosing to do the will of God', were considered a selfless step-up from an individualistic, self-centred consciousness. Employing *The Urantia Book's* rhetoric:

Such a creature choice is not a surrender of will. It is a consecration of will, an expansion of will, a glorification of will, a perfecting of will ...  
This choosing does not so much consist in the negation of creature will – "Not my will but yours be done" – as it consists in the creature's positive affirmation: "It is my will that your will be done" ... (*The Urantia Book* 1955, p. 1221).

A consecration of the individual will, guided by God, for the cooperative good of all, amounted to 'being in the consciousness'. How such affiliation or 'attunement' to common understanding was assessed and recognised was a complex matter, and as this study shows, what was 'in' or 'outside' the formula was a constantly shifting construction.

## **On Definitions and Societal Responses**

How then should NRMs be viewed, in the Australian context, with so many influences, all re-contextualised into constantly shifting social, cultural, and political circumstances? The UBI experience shows that formation of an NRM is fluid and even random; its subsequent development distinctive in each case, despite its intersection of multiple and even global influences. How do definitions and typologies impact upon NRM formation, and subsequent understandings of what has emerged?

Here the four definitions explored in the Introduction: Theological, Psychological, Sociological (Saliba 2003 pp. 1–11) and the Spiritual/Religious model I have added, are matched against the Robinsons and the UBI data explored in the Chapters. Some nuances within the three definitional modes put by Saliba (2003), along with some history that relates to the UBI, are presented here, to see where and how the UBI experience makes a contribution to the current literature.

### **On the UBI and the Theological Definition**

The *Anti-christian othering of cults* common in the theological writing of Christians, both established and evangelical/fundamentalist, is counterpointed here by the accepting and reasonable stances of a cluster of Australian Christian commentators. The history of anticult organisations of the mid-to-late 1970s in Western Australia specifically, and the political dimensions of this activity, are also covered in this section.

#### **The UBI as ‘The Work of the Devil’**

For those who adopted the most literal theological definitional models, the UBI was a sitting-duck ‘cult’. Try as we might, the UBI could never find any real unity with the Evangelical stream of Christianity (even though the pioneer New Age prophets like Fred had learnt their millennialism from this stream). While media ‘UFO cult’ depictions were enough to marginalise the group, on closer inspection there was even more for Christian groups to denounce. The two extra ‘New Age Bibles’, *Oahspe* and *The Urantia Book*, were seen as supplanting the old one, which Fred had described as *full of fairy stories for little children*. For any Christian apologist wanting to investigate further, *The Urantia Book* presented a whole *new* New Testament, purporting to fill in the gaps in Jesus’ life and teachings – clearly heretical. The *Oahspe*:

*A Kosmon Bible* went even further, rejecting the need for religious ‘saviours’; focussing on religion’s potential contribution to better society.<sup>354</sup> The UBI was for these reasons seen as apostate; ‘in league with Satan’. Fred Robinson’s attitude towards such views was equally dismissive:

*They are sincere, simple people who think they need beliefs. Mostly good souls, but they haven’t got a clue about the new conditions that will apply for the Aquarian Age – God bless them. If they love God and one another they will be O.K. But they are of the old order, don’t let them trouble you* (Fred Robinson, pers. comm., 1970s).

Fred’s rejection of the dogma of ‘atonement’ and the various theories about the ‘ransom of Jesus’ was the most troubling for Christians.<sup>355</sup> Those who saw ‘being saved by the blood of Jesus’ as the central issue of Christianity could never see UBI Members as fellow Christians. Fred’s focus on the ‘teachings of Jesus’ as distinct from the ‘teachings about Jesus’ was always a point of theological difference.

### **Acceptance: The Exceptions**

During Fred’s lecture tours, Rev. Ted Noffs proved appreciative of Fred and the movement that arose around him, allowing Fred to speak at the Wayside Chapel whenever he was in Sydney.<sup>356</sup> Noffs found time for other *anti-authoritarians* trying to assist youth by working with them, as Fred had shown he was prepared to do. He was extraordinarily helpful to Fred and I when Fred first came to Sydney, inviting Fred to speak to the disaffected youth who gathered at the Wayside Chapel. He put no restriction on Fred regarding topics to be covered. Fred simply answered questions, as was Ted Noffs’s practice.

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<sup>354</sup> *Oahspe* speaks of the need for all religions to help the various nations and peoples to rise upward. It also speaks of what it calls ‘the religion of Gods themselves’, in which its adherents have no need for intermediaries such as Saviours and Idols, but who commune directly with the Creator of all ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oahspe:\\_A\\_New\\_Bible#Religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oahspe:_A_New_Bible#Religion), accessed 14.3.2011).

<sup>355</sup> The theory teaches that the death of Christ was a ransom, usually said to have been paid to Satan, in satisfaction of his just claim on the souls of humanity as a result of sin ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ransom\\_theory\\_of\\_atonement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ransom_theory_of_atonement), accessed 14.3.2011).

<sup>356</sup> Theodore Delwin Noffs (1926–1995) was a Methodist minister, writer and founder of the Ted Noff’s Foundation and the Wayside Chapel in Kings Cross, Sydney, in 1964. During the youth revolt of the 1960s, Noffs was attracted to what he saw as the life-affirming side of the movement. Although aware of the problem of drug-abuse and the alienation of youth, he believed that they were ‘...a part of the paraphernalia behind the revolution, the symbolism behind the revolt’ (1979, p. 55). Noffs sought fairness and equality for all. With a focus on the practical, he raised funding from both government and business to set up facilities for the disadvantaged; in many cases these projects were the first of their kind in Australia ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ted\\_Noffs#cite\\_note-0](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ted_Noffs#cite_note-0), accessed 23.8.2011).

The Dean of Perth, the Very Rev. John Hazlewood invited Fred and his musical entourage to run the major part of a rock-mass late in 1971, about eight months after the ground-breaking Christian Rock Mass happening in St George's Cathedral, Perth. Hazlewood saw Fred as tapping into the mass consciousness of the youth, through a free kind of spirituality, similar to his own *rock-mass-appeal* to youth.<sup>357</sup>

The Quakers, thanks particularly to Donald Groom and his wife Erica, billeted Fred's entourage in late 1971, and opened their main Meeting Room for Fred's lectures the following year, without asking a cent in return. Erica did the same for a couple of years after Donald's untimely death in aircraft accident on 11<sup>th</sup> of August 1972.

A good relationship existed between the UBI and the elderly Spanish Benedictine monks of New Norcia.<sup>358</sup> This monastery town was approximately half-way between Perth and the Carranya Community (near Coorow). The monks kindly sold the UBI Community their spare set of flour-milling-stones at a nominal price. The monks expressed feelings of fellowship with us, appreciating our own pioneering of a 'modern monastery'. Some monks came to visit, while some UBI members stopped off on their way either up from or back to Shalam. These monks understood what we were doing at both the personal-religious and practical level – simply ignoring the UFOs and other *cosmic considerations*.

Catholic Priest Fr. Bernie Dwyer ran the Marriage Encounter weekend for the married couples of the UBI. Fr. Dwyer and other priests of the Bunbury Diocese both modelled and encouraged friendly relations between the UBI and their congregations, even supporting some of our initiatives (see Chapter 6, Part 2: 'Moral Action Alert').

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<sup>357</sup> The 'Rock Mass For Love' LP was recorded live during a TVW Channel 7 outside broadcast at St George's Cathedral, Perth on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1971. (<http://watvhistory.com/2010/12/historic-rock-mass-for-love-in-perth-western-australia/>, accessed 14.3.2011); for the rock group Bakery's interview which includes a description of the rock mass see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iKe8K7B5W6o> (accessed 14.3.2011).

<sup>358</sup> New Norcia is a town in Western Australia, 132 km (82 miles) north of Perth, along the Great Northern Highway. It is the only monastic town in Australia. The last Spanish Benedictine monk of New Norcia died on 18 January 2010, aged 99. He had continued to prepare the bread for the monks almost until his death ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New\\_Norcia,\\_Western\\_Australia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Norcia,_Western_Australia), accessed 14.3.2011).

## Anti-cult Activities in WA

During the Community's *ascendancy period*, the father of one of the women members of the UBI alleged that Fred Robinson and his 'cult' had turned his daughter into a Zombie. Prior to this publicity, a group of local *concerned parents* of members of the Unification Church (Moonies) and the Children of God (The Family International)<sup>359</sup> had formed an informal anti-cult movement. This father had contacted them and encouraged UBI parents to become involved. When this group closed it passed its files to Western Australian Churches of Christ Minister Adrian van Leen, who had studied religious groups since his teens, collecting information on contemporary religious groups since 1959. After the Jonestown deaths in November 1978 van Leen discovered that the information he was compiling could be helpful to others:

... people began asking serious questions and were wanting accurate information on numerous groups – questions not really asked or information not really sought, before that event. As more and more people sought my help in this it became apparent that that I needed to deepen and professionalise my research. This also led to the founding of the Concerned Christians Growth Ministries in October 1979 (van Leen 1999, p. 1).

The media, looking for stories at both ends of the 'cult' debate, labelled van Leen and his fledgling organisation, Concerned Christians Growth Ministries (CCGM) a 'cult buster'.<sup>360</sup> Van Leen says

This misrepresents my position. I don't want to bust anything. I believe in religious freedom. I just want to give people information from the movements themselves and pass on my Christian position clearly' (telephone conversation, 14.3.2011).

Van Leen and I corresponded while I was the spokesperson of the UBI Community about a number of issues, and did so without rancour; indeed we worked together for a short period to field our united concern about the establishment of a 'Rajneeshee' or

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<sup>359</sup> The Children of God (COG), later known as the Family of Love, The Family, and now The Family International (TFI), is a new religious movement started in 1968 in Huntington Beach, California. Many of its early converts were drawn from the hippie movement. The Children of God was among the movements prompting the cult controversy of the 1970s and 1980s in the United States and Europe and is regarded as triggering the first organised anticult group FEEOG ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family\\_International](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family_International), accessed 23.6.2011).

<sup>360</sup> Van Leen explained that the tag 'cult buster' was applied to him directly after the popular film *Ghost Buster* was released in June 1984. *Ghostbusters* as the film became known is an American sci-fi comedy film written by co-stars Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis about three eccentric New York City parapsychologists-turned-ghost capturers (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghostbusters>, accessed 14.3.2011).

‘Orange People’ Community in the Pemberton district in 1985. That year van Leen appeared on national television multiple times; twice with Ma Anand Sheela.<sup>361</sup>

Reflecting on the experience, he says

I was set up for ridicule by Richard Neville on Ray Martin’s *Today Show*. The media built up a *cult-buster-kill-joy* stereotype to discredit both me and Christian values. I have it all documented and will perhaps write about it sometime (ibid.).

Van Leen’s experience reveals how the media constantly shift positions, in this case to sensationalise ‘cults’ and ridicule ‘anticults’,<sup>362</sup> and to exploit positions which made for interesting television – in the process reifying endemic stereotypes about both ‘cults’ and ‘anticults’, making rational dialogue between opposing groups all the more difficult to facilitate.

Van Leen uses the term Contemporary Religious Movements (CRMs) rather than NRMs, as he believes this term most accurately depicts the phenomena, since many groups in the domain are not ‘new’ but merely ‘contemporary’ manifestations of older beliefs. Van Leen outlines his own typology: Western Pseudo-Christian Exclusivist Groups; Extreme Christian Fringe Groups; Human Potential Groups; New Age Groups; Eastern Mystical Groups; Occult Groups (van Leen 1999, p. 6).<sup>363</sup> Van Leen takes a traditional ‘theological stance’ as described by Saliba, but tempers this with a commitment to religious freedom. He does not for instance endorse kidnapping to facilitate deprogramming of a ‘brainwashed’ adult (telephone conversation, 14.3.2011). Van Leen’s organisation *Lookout*, also known as the Concerned Christians Growth Ministries Inc. (the legal entity), is one of three Australian anticult movements (ACMs) currently operating in Australia, which also functioned during the life of the Universal Brotherhood. Australian ACMs appear to be less aggressive than their American

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<sup>361</sup> Ma Anand Sheela (born 1950) (also known as Ambalal Patel Sheela, Sheela Silverman, later Sheela Birnstiel) is a former follower, secretary and spokeswoman for the Indian mystic and spiritual teacher Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, later commonly known as Osho, who was the main planner for the 1984 Rajneeshee bioterror attack. In 1985, Sheela visited Australia as a spokeswoman for Rajneesh and gained nationwide prominence following an interview with reporter Ian Leslie on *60 Minutes*. During the interview, Sheela was asked about concerns over plans for the Rajneesh cult’s expansion in Western Australia, to which she famously replied, ‘Tough titties’ ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ma\\_Anand\\_Sheela](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ma_Anand_Sheela), accessed 14.3.2011).

<sup>362</sup> Van Leen sees his organisation as ‘counter-cult’ rather than an ‘anti-cult’.

<sup>363</sup> See also van Leen’s website *Lookout* (<http://www.ccg.org.au/articles/Articles/ARTICLE-0052.htm>, accessed 14.3.2011).



counterparts, operating more as research and information services than as active agencies for opposing 'cult' inclined NRMs. Van Leen's booklet *The New Age Spirituality Examined* (2004) and his book *The Problems of Extreme Christian Fringe Groups* (2009) employ a restrained tone in their critiquing of positions he assesses as unrepresentative of true Bible-based Christianity.

## **On the UBI and the Psychological Definitions**

Although the psychological definition of NRMs ('cults') was widely employed by ACMs during the 1970s and '80s when the UBI was functioning, it was rarely employed by the press against the UBI. Black in her 1984 thesis *Fashioning the Earth Anew* focussed on the psychological definition of the group. It has been during the ongoing *retrospective discussion and publicity phase of the UBI* (from 1989) that this definition has been most employed to describe it. The *Compass* program 'The Brotherhood' emplots this definition in its depiction of the group, suggesting that the leaders were 'controlling', and that the followers were 'brainwashed' via a process of coercive persuasion. As the argument for 'brainwashing' is assumed to be true in both the media's emplotment of 'cult', and in the theological definition, a counterpointed examination of the argument needs to be made here.

## **Brainwashing and Deprogramming**

Thomas Robbins' in 'Constructing Cultist "Mind Control"' (2003) points out that

Concepts such as 'brainwashing' and 'mind control' are inherently normative. Szasz (1976, p. 10) notes, 'We do not call all types of personal or psychological influences "brainwashing." We reserve this term for influences of which we disapprove'. The application of such concepts to a given group necessarily stigmatises that group; however, the stigma is frequently primarily *connotative*. It does not derive from what is actually empirically established about a group in question but from the choice of terminology or interpretive framework from which empirical observations are considered (Robbins 2003 p. 167).

Robbins claims that the case against 'cults' with respect to 'brainwashing' is grounded in a 'critical external perspective to evaluate and analyse processes within movements' (ibid., p.170). Meanwhile 'an emphatic internal perspective' (ibid.) is employed 'to interpret the activities outside the movement through which devotees are physically coerced, pressed to de-convert or guided in the reinterpretation of cultist experiences' (ibid.). In a similar way 'the polemical defence of cults tends to combine a critical

external perspective on deprogramming and anticult activities with an emphatic internal orientation towards what goes on in cults (e.g., Coleman 1982) (Robbins 2003, p. 170). The issue of ‘*who is a credible witness*’ (ibid.) is the problem of evaluating the testimonies of both present devotees/alignees and apostates/ex-members:

One’s analysis can too easily be predetermined by one’s implicit epistemological exclusionary rule... Arguments on either side depend upon arbitrary or *a priori* assumptions, interpretive frameworks, and linguistic conventions (Robbins 2003, p. 171).

Studies indicate that a substantial number of ex-members of NRMs do not interpret their experience in terms of brainwashing (see Skonovd 1981; Wright 1983). The absolute contrast of devotees’ and ex-devotees’ accounts of their NRM experiences arises from the fact that more public attention has been focussed on a subset of ex-devotees who have become assimilated to an anticult subculture or social network (Solomon 1981).

Many models are used to explore ‘coercive persuasion’. Robbins notes that one of the most respected was developed by Edgar Schein and his colleagues (1961) in which it was argued that if the notion of coercive persuasion was to achieve objectivity then

it must be seen as transpiring in a wide range of – often culturally valued – contexts, e.g., conventional religious orders, fraternities, mental hospitals, the army. Coercive persuasion is generally stigmatised only when its goal is detested, e.g., producing communists or Moonies (Robbins 2003, p.172).

Richardson and Kilburn (1983) suggest that ‘models of “coercive persuasion”, “brainwashing” and “thought reform” vary in the stringency of the existential criteria’ (Robbins 2003, p. 172). The varieties of models which have been applied in the study of NRM ‘brainwashing’ (see Robbins 2003, pp. 171–173) lead Robbins to the following conclusion:

Given the array of diverse models of varying restrictiveness, *cults can ‘brainwash’ and be ‘coercive’ depending upon which model is employed*. Polemicists tend to conflate different models or shift back and forth between models (Robbins 2003, p. 172).

While there are undoubtedly influences within many NRMs which may be inimical to both personal growth and freedom as experienced in general society, the concept of ‘brainwashing’ is largely a rhetorical construct.

Rhetorical mystiques about mind control have the consequence of implying that cultist involvements are involuntary and that devotees are not fully capable of making rational choice. In consequence, these arguments serve as a rationale for legitimating social control measures which treat devotees *as if they were mentally incompetent* without formally labelling them as such and without applying rigorous criteria of civil commitment (Robbins 2003, p. 176).

One of the purposes of this study has been to demystify the ways in which unorthodox beliefs occur: gradually built into the fabric of developing new religious movements over decades. Both influenced by, and as a considered response to the surrounding cultural influences, NRM members can rarely be considered as having been deliberately inculcated by ‘brainwashing’ over a relatively short period of *involuntary coercive persuasion* – yet this is the present conception presented via the ‘cult-brainwashing’ stereotype.

A shift of focus will be necessary to transcend the inconclusive psychologism of debates over brainwashing. Such a shift will not isolate cults as a special theoretical compartment but will reconsider the uneasy general boundary of church and state... (Robbins 2003, p. 177).

If ‘brainwashing’ is the centrepiece of theological and psychological definitions of NRMs, which work together to accentuate a need for anticult complicit de-programming and exit counselling services; it is the ‘cult’ rhetoric formed as a result of violent incidents, both within and by NRMs, that has highlighted ‘brainwashing’ as the root cause of such violence. It is therefore important to refer to a sociological study which unearths cultural influences that have shaped public perceptions of NRMs.

## **A Sociological Review of Jonestown**

The sociological study of NRMs reveals they are not in fact prone to violence (see Melton & Bromley 2002).

In fact violent behaviour may well be more rare among NRMs than the general population – at least in America. At any given time there are many thousands of NRMs operating in the world. Yet only a tiny handful of these groups have systematically reverted to violence to serve its ends, and with one exception (Aum Shinrikyo), this violence has been directed primarily at its own members (Dawson 2003, p. 181).

As the issue of violence performed within NRMs is vital in understanding the ‘cult’ frame into which NRMs have been pushed (largely by anticult-driven media emplotment) it is useful to examine the very worst of the violent NRM incidents to have

taken place in modern times – one that shaped the ‘cult’ stereotype and is still firmly lodged in the collective memory.

Jonestown plays into a generalised collective memory that has enshrined Jones in the popular culture as the image incarnate of the AntiChrist, and People’s Temple as the paragon of the religious ‘cult’ (Hall 2003, p. 187).

News articles, films, television docudramas and more than twenty books let alone a plethora of allusions to the ‘Jonestown’ scenario, have almost freed the incident from a historical analysis which asks what factors precipitated this terrible event. Hall (1987, 1990; and reprinted in Dawson 2003, pp. 186–207) makes an indispensable contribution to the question of what precipitated the events of 18<sup>th</sup> November 1978, when the leader of the People’s Temple, Jim Jones, orchestrated acts of murder, followed by the ‘revolutionary suicide’ of his followers – in all 918 people died. But exactly what precipitated the events of that day has been largely ignored in favour of the powerful ‘cult’ narrative which still sets the public’s agenda in relation to NRMs.

... (T)his collective memory now floats free from what, in a simpler era, historians liked to think of as facts. But when we search for the sources of this memory, they trace back to the ‘Concerned Relatives,’ the organisation that had opposed the People’s Temple in the first place, and the representatives of the media whom the temple opponents drew into the ill-fated journey to Jonestown. After the murders and mass suicide, the Concerned Relatives became the outsiders with the most knowledge about a group that had carried out an appalling act of mass suicide. Indeed, because the Concerned Relatives had consistently sought to raise the alarm against the People’s Temple before 18 November 1978, they could take the mass suicide as a sad validation of their concerns. But by the same token, popular accounts of Jonestown depend heavily on the accounts of the Concerned Relatives, and these accounts tended to suppress a crucial question. Did the actions of the Concerned Relatives and the media in any way contribute to the grisly outcome of events in which they were not only observers, but also participants? (Hall 2003, p. 187).

While Hall is no apologist for Jones’s practices: ‘No one should gainsay the reprehensible features of the People’s Temple public relations, politics, and social control’ (ibid., p. 195); he does suggest that while rejecting the reprehensible, there should also be a recognition that the Temple’s practices, both legitimate and illegitimate, were ‘hardly foreign to the wider world’ (p. 195). Hall does not shrink from making an unpopular but clearly important point about the part which the ex-members and the media played as representatives of that wider social world:

Given the tragic deaths, the cultural opponents had a vital interest in denying that their actions had any consequences. This interest may account for their consistent promotion of the doctrine of *cult essentialism*, whereby the dynamics of religious movements are treated as wholly internal, and unaffected by interaction with the wider social world. Such an analysis would free the cultural opponents and the media from any responsibility for incidents of religious-movement violence. But precisely because the proponents of cult essentialism themselves participated in the events, it is important to give their actions consideration along with other factors that may have contributed to the outcome of murder and mass suicide (ibid., p. 187).

While Hall's depiction of the events leading up to 18<sup>th</sup> November 1978 at Jonestown cannot be retold here in the detail that makes his observations so compelling, it is important to at least inspect the *myth of Jonestown* if the 'cult' stereotype, which sprouted at Jonestown and self-seeds today, is to be understood and mitigated – 'in the absence of this analysis, Jonestown becomes as Roland Barthes wrote of myths more generally, "a story at once true and unreal"' (Barthes 1972, p. 128) (Hall 2003, p. 187).

The myth of Jonestown has a long half-life because it serves vital needs *not* to understand the murders and mass suicide historically. In effect, the myth of Jonestown displaces history by suppressing alternative narratives that might debunk ideology. Only when this ideological lens is broken can we search for historical explanations (Hall 2003, p. 187).

How does the breaking of the Jonestown 'ideological lens' affect the arguments and propositions presented here about both UBI and NRMs in general? Like Jim Jones, many founders of NRMs are unrelenting iconoclasts – certainly Fred Robinson was. The following descriptions of Jones's goals can be seen to have resonance with Fred Robinson – but with a more Gandhian non-violent accent than Jones's militancy. Having said this Fred Robinson was just as strident in his conspiracy theory pronouncements. Both parallels and differences can be observed between Jones's appeal and that of many other countercultural leaders of NRMs – including the UBI.

Jones sought to forge a militant movement of people committed to the vision of a utopian alternative to racist, class dominated, and imperialist society. People's Temple thus carried a double onus: It was a countercultural communal group and a militant anti-American social movement (Hall 2003, p. 188).

Communalism has long been seen as alien to mainstream Western culture. While both 'legitimate' religious organisations/orders and the military submit to collective authority, in public discourse the collectivism of countercultural groups confronts dominant Western ideology which embraces capitalism, individualism and strict notions

of the nuclear family. Countercultural social experiments thus become coded as antidemocratic and subversive (Alexander & Smith 1993; Hall 2003, p. 188).

Like other religious social movements the People's Temple practised communal socialism. Yet unlike most countercultural hippie communes and utopian communal groups of the 1960s and early 1970s, People's Temple located its communalism in a leftist political vein of crude communism (Hall 2003, p. 188).<sup>364</sup>

Jones's apocalyptic imagery appealed to members of his audience familiar with the religious rhetoric he employed, and accustomed to the political language of class and race which amplified their latent resentments. The dual strategy forged an attractive religious radicalism that stood in militant opposition to American capitalist society: 'Because Jones so sharply opposed the predominant ideology, that ideology requires that his movement and its demise be misunderstood' (ibid.). Some of the details about the involvement of the Concerned Relatives, Congressman Leo Ryan and the media in the Jonestown murders and mass-suicide need to be mentioned here if Hall's position is to make sense:

By small steps, the struggles by the Concerned Relatives to gain custody over particular children and access to particular relatives became refocussed into an effort to 'dismantle' what they eventually portrayed as a 'concentration camp' (Hall 1987, p. 232-3). The Concerned Relatives demanded nothing less than that Jonestown cease to exist as a bounded communal society. In effect they gambled that they could bring Jonestown to a public reckoning without precipitating the extreme acts of violent resistance that the community had threatened...

The expedition that Leo Ryan led to Jonestown was publicly billed as a 'fact-finding-effort' of a congregational delegation, but this public facade obscured a working alliance between Ryan and the Concerned Relatives. As preparations unfolded no other congressman would join Ryan on the trip, and for this reason the expedition failed to meet congregational criteria as an official congregational delegation. Another California congressman, Don Edwards, advised that taking the trip under such circumstances 'was not the right thing to do.' Edwards later recalled, 'I said congressmen are ill-advised to take matters into their own hands'. But Ryan pressed ahead anyway, accompanied unofficially by a number Concerned Relatives and some journalists (Hall 2003, p. 200).

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<sup>364</sup> Marceline Jones bequeathed literally millions of dollars to the Communist Party of the USSR ([http://jonestown.sdsu.edu/AboutJonestown/PrimarySources/financialLetters/letter\\_fromMarceline.pdf](http://jonestown.sdsu.edu/AboutJonestown/PrimarySources/financialLetters/letter_fromMarceline.pdf), accessed 24.8.2011).

It was well-known to the Concerned Relatives that Jones believed in ‘revolutionary suicide’, having conferred with Huey Newton, the Black Panther co-founder who authored the term.<sup>365</sup> The cultural significance of Jonestown can only be understood by asking why the mass suicide occurred. Hall makes ‘a general list of *necessary preconditions* – without which the murderous attack and mass self-destruction would not have occurred’ (Hall 2003, p. 202). These were the *internal features* of the group, such as its apocalyptic ideology and its strong social boundaries in cognitive isolation from society at large. Hall points out that the list was common to many similar groups where violence had been rare (ibid., p. 203); so he reasons that there must also be

... specific additional *precipitating factors* that would result in murders and mass suicide.

In contemporary circumstances, the necessary precipitating factors would seem to be the...

- mobilisation of a group of cultural opponents who possess a high degree of solidarity;
- the shaping of news media coverage through the cultural opponents’ frame of interpretation about ‘cults’;
- the exercise of state authority (ibid.).

Taking many factors into consideration Hall comes to the following conclusions about the causes of the Jonestown tragedy:

Clearly, the proximate cause of murder and mass suicide was the refusal of Jim Jones, his staff, and the loyalists among his followers to brook compromise with his opponents whom they believed (with some reason) were out to bring Jonestown as a community to an end. Rather than submit to external powers that they regarded as illegitimate, they chose to stage the airstrip murders as revenge and shut out their opponents by ending their own lives (ibid.).

Hall’s socio-historical cultural analysis of the ‘cult’- defining Jonestown episode says much about the stigmatisation and thwarting of NRM communalist experiments by the prevailing individualistic culture:

The ‘negative cult’ of Jonestown thus stands as an ominous monument to an arsenal of manipulations that persist in wider institutional practices. To isolate this arsenal, its boundaries must be drawn more widely than the jungle commune ...

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<sup>365</sup> In January 1977 Jones visited Newton in Havana. After Jones fled to Jonestown in Guyana, Newton spoke to Temple members in Jonestown via telephone patch supporting Jones. Newton’s cousin, Stanley Clayton, was one of the few residents of Jonestown to escape the 1978 tragedy ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huey\\_P.\\_Newton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huey_P._Newton), accessed 11.5.2011).

After the murders and mass suicide, People's Temple became the quintessence of the 'cult,' stereotypically portrayed as an organisation that drains both property and free will from its members and 'brainwashes them' into a 'group mind'. Yet these issues have nothing specific to do with People's Temple's sustained and increasingly violent interpretation of revolutionary suicide as a doctrine of struggle against an established social order. Instead, they stem from a more general cultural reflection of communalism as a form of life alien to capitalist democratic society. The tragedy of Jonestown thus became an opportunity for scapegoating a broader form of social organisation that is not inherently associated with mass suicide. Here, the conflict that produced Jonestown was recapitulated at the core of its mythical reconstruction, for the demonization of communalism as 'other' reinforces the ideology of individualism, thus providing the grounds for further antagonism between communalists and their cultural opponents (Hall 2003, p. 206).

Jonestown certainly marked the end of the Universal Brotherhood's growth phase. Suspicion was rife as locals wondered what might be going on beneath the surface of the *seemingly successful Community*. Now that it could by association be labelled a theologically heretical and psychologically controlling 'cult', the UBI would have a harder time with the press and society at large. A feature length docudrama, shot by a Californian alignee of Fred's, was in the early stages of editing in November 1978. After Jonestown the project was abandoned: 'A positive film about a commune just would not go down over here' the filmmaker told me. The footage, sitting in a garage for thirty years, was recovered for use in the ABC's own portrayal of the UBI. To infuse the documentary with the Jonestown myth, footage of the dead bodies of Jonestown was employed, cementing the UBI within the frame of *essential cultism*.

Being aware of the factors at work within the partisan 'correct' theological definition, the 'controlling' psychological definition, and the neutral or 'cultural' sociological definition; it is finally important to explore something of what the literature which informed the UBI says about New Religious Movements – how cults themselves define cults, without stereotyping them within the post Jonestown 'cult' frame.

## **A UBI Modelled Religious/Spiritual Definition**

While something can be learnt about NRMs in general from the accounts of the early functioning of the Robinsons' Shalam and the later UBI, perhaps the failure of the group provides the most important lesson for New Religious Movements themselves, helping to define themselves to themselves, out of a literature designed to understand the dynamics of NRMs from the 'inside' – a cultural-religious positioning.



In the past, truth has grown rapidly and expanded freely when the cult has been elastic, the symbolism expansile. Abundant truth and an adjustable cult have favoured rapidity of social progression (*The Urantia Book* 1955, p. 965).

During the ascendancy phase of the movement and in the early days of the organisation, elasticity was evident. As the Universal Brotherhood evolved it tended to become more organised on one hand – and this had real benefits for the development of the group in terms of its standard of living; on the other hand it lost some of its capacity for sustained growth because it became too organised, losing its attractive spontaneity. Mary Robinson – the theocratic ‘nucleus’ of the group – was unable to let go of the responsibility she felt as founder. The concept of the ‘nucleus’ of the group (Mary’s initial construction) was supported by a pamphlet, written by a then-enthusiastic member, who extolled and rationalised this ‘nucleus’ principle in supposedly ‘scientific’ terms (see ‘Nucleus’ in the Glossary). The concept of following the guidance of the central figure of a group – as the vehicle through which ‘God’s Will’ is conveyed – can all too easily compromise the philosophical integrity of a group.

A meaningless cult vitiates religion when it attempts to supplant philosophy and to enslave reason; a genuine cult grows (*The Urantia Book* 1955, p. 965).

The way in which decisions are arrived at is clearly one of the most important areas for the consideration of NRMs, along with the question of the ‘egocentric’ nature of many NRMs. Some NRMs have overtly set out to assist the larger society around them. The Salvation Army for instance, once seen as a ‘cult’, its early members including reformed alcoholics and prostitutes, is a good example. ‘The three S’s’ best expressed the way in which the Army administered: first, soup; second, soap; and finally, salvation’.<sup>366</sup>

The old cults were too egocentric; the new must be the outgrowth of applied love. The new cult must, like the old, foster sentiment, satisfy emotion, and promote loyalty; but it must do more: It must facilitate spiritual progress, enhance cosmic meanings, augment moral values, encourage social development, and stimulate a high type of personal religious living. The new cult must provide supreme goals of living which are both temporal and eternal – social and spiritual (*The Urantia Book* 1955, p. 966).

Although selfless service appears to be a key plank of any NRM that will flourish long term – whether accepted by society or not – there needs to be some particularly dynamic

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<sup>366</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Salvation\\_Army#cite\\_note-4](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Salvation_Army#cite_note-4), accessed 15.4.2011.

inner motive, that allows for contemplation of the central theme of the innovative religious expression which caused the group to coalesce in the first place:

No cult can survive unless it embodies some masterful mystery and conceals some worthwhile unattainable. Again, the new symbolism must not only be significant for the group but also meaningful to the individual. The forms of any serviceable symbolism must be those which the individual can carry out on his own initiative, and which he can also enjoy with his fellows. If the new cult could only be dynamic instead of static, it might really contribute something worthwhile to the progress of mankind, both temporal and spiritual.

But a cult – a symbolism of rituals, slogans, or goals – will not function if it is too complex. And there must be the demand for devotion, the response of loyalty. Every effective religion unerringly develops a worthy symbolism, and its devotees would do well to prevent the crystallisation of such a ritual into cramping, deforming, and stifling stereotyped ceremonials which can only handicap and retard all social, moral, and spiritual progress. No cult can survive if it retards moral growth and fails to foster spiritual progress. The cult is the skeletal structure around which grows the living and dynamic body of personal spiritual experience – true religion (Presented by a Brilliant Evening Star of Nebadon, in *The Urantia Book* 1955, p. 966).

Quotes from *The Urantia Book* show how the primary sources of NRMs can contribute to secondary research about them. Daschke and Ashcraft's *New Religious Movements: A Documentary Reader* (2005) allows for the expression/voicing of primary 'emic' texts within the secondary 'etic' domain of sociological research. The development of a religious/spiritual definition of NRMs based on texts within the religious domain itself, rather than from theological, psychological, or sociological definitions has been attempted here to a very limited degree, using *The Urantia Book* quotes I was aware of. A more extensive compilation of annotated quotes about the formations of religions from within religious texts would be a useful resource.

## **The Myth of the Eternal Return**

This study has placed the UBI as a new religious movement/organisation that rearticulated spiritual and communal ideas and impulses from the nineteenth-century and attempted to institutionalise New Age tenets in a late twentieth-century *scientised* frame. The Robinsons have been depicted as *New Age Pioneers* (a sub-cultural group born before and between the Wars), who, through a band of countercultural baby-boomer alignees put New Age theories into practice. While the group failed in terms of *organisational longevity*, it did not fail in providing a *potent experience* to those involved.

The idea that a bio-historical cultural analysis of a no longer functioning *old* New Age movement like the UBI might unearth issues and concepts that make a contribution to another generation of ‘seekers’, is one that is grounded in what James Hillman<sup>367</sup> calls ‘the myth of eternal return (1999) – a myth which is supported by the *genesisstories* of the Robinsons, and told with an eye to cultural contexts prior to the formation of the UBI, the NRM which focuses the research. Are the Robinsons and the UBI relevant today? The myth of eternal return suggests they are, and that the NRM they started is likely to be rearticulated in some form:

The myth of Eternal Return is based on a radical premise: time is cyclical. What happens now has happened before and will happen again at some basic level if not exactly in each detail. This cyclical repetition reflects the eternal time of the cosmos. Stable, sacred patterns or archetypal forces govern the changing life of the world. Life in the world moves forward in secular time, usually quite ignorant of the mythic patterns it is repeating and cannot escape from. We do not see the new is the old come round again, and to understand the new we must return to the old (Hillman 1999, p. 127).

‘Oldness’, as Hillman suggests, ‘suffers from clichéd comparisons with the “new”, “fresh”, “young” and “of the future”’; its meaning narrows to the stale, the worn, the dying, and the past’ (1999, p. 42). If ‘old’ can only be defined by pairing, it loses its value. ‘Old’, especially in the ‘new world’, gets the short end of the comparative stick, ‘and it becomes ever more difficult to imagine oldness as a phenomenon apart from the lazy simplicities of conventional wisdom’ (Hillman 1999, p. 42). This study has attempted to explore the Robinsons and their ideas without always comparing them to today’s thinking, but rather relating them and their ideas to the thinking and lifestyle of the times in which they lived.

By walking around the Robinsons’ world, seeing it from a number of sides (circumambulation); by expanding their worlds to explore the details of the people and organisations that taught them (amplification), the study aimed to glean more of the Robinsons’ characters and their own epiphanies and revelations, which set the patterns

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<sup>367</sup>James Hillman (1926 –) is an American psychologist. He studied at the C.G. Jung Institute in Zurich, developed archetypal psychology and is now retired as a private practitioner. His magnum opus, *Re-visiting Psychology* (1975) was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. His 1997 book, *The Soul’s Code: In Search of Character and Calling*, was on The New York Times Best Seller List that year. His works and ideas about philosophy and psychology have also been popularised by other authors such as Thomas Moore ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James\\_Hillman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Hillman), accessed 23.9.2011).

of the later Universal Brotherhood Community. Having explored the formative history of the UBI through the biographies of the Robinsons, both individually and together, it is more possible to place the UBI within the typology of New Religious Movements first explored in Chapter 4.

## **The UBI and Daschke & Ashcraft's NRM Typology:**

Daschke and Ashcraft's (2005) typology of NRMs employed five themes – 'nexuses of novelty' – to typify NRMs: 'New Understandings', 'New Selves', 'New Family', 'New Society', and 'New World' (ibid., pp. 8–14). In placing the UBI along this continuum from the *personal* to *universal*; and also as '*circular* and *reversible*' (ibid., p. 13) the typology encourages the concept of a relational matrix:

To achieve the fullest comprehension and analysis, any given NRM can be viewed primarily through the lens of one of these categories, but then the diligent investigator must trace the multifarious connections between their nexus of novelty and any others that might be pertinent (ibid., pp. 13–14).

## **The 'New Society' focussed Universal Brotherhood**

In terms of Daschke's typology the UBI can best be described a 'New Society'. The day Fred Robinson met Mary Broun they discussed the *Secret of the Andes* (Williamson, 1961) and its 'Brotherhood' cum Alternative Society. They immediately tried to start a New Age village – a model for a 'New Society'. It took an alliance with the countercultural baby-boomers to materialise. This direction was driven by *Oahspe's* instruction to come out from among the world's people to start a new society, based on God's Laws, as a service to the next generation – the New Agers – who would grow up to expand the model already set in motion; a model that would (after a 'planetary cleansing') replace the present society based on selfishness, competition and a money-system conspiracy based on the practice of usury. A new 'alternative' society was to be the most deeply engraved motif of the UBI.

## **The UBI's 'New Understandings'**

While there were many 'new understandings' – both of this world and the cosmos – taught by the Robinsons and based on their compilation of *Modern Revealed Knowledge*, these were always secondary to the need for action: 'building the new society'. 'New Understandings' can be seen as building blocks of the 'New Society',

rather than as vital in themselves. While the media always highlighted the ‘new understandings’, such as those about Flying Saucers, as defining the group to their readership; to the members of the group itself, this was simply one of a range of unprovable-either-way propositions which the Robinsons put, as part of an overarching, expandable and often contradictory schema. Since no old or new ‘understanding’ needed to be ‘believed’ by the Robinsons’ alignees or UBI members, the group cannot be seen as being grounded in beliefs couched as ‘new understandings’ – other than that which alignees already understood from their countercultural backgrounds: the need to create a New Society.

### **The ‘New Selves’ of the UBI.**

The creating of ‘New Selves’ was seen by Fred Robinson as a natural bi-product of impersonal, selfless loving service for the benefit of the whole – the building of the Alternative Society for the children – as per the *Oahspean* blueprint. Without specific mediation techniques or ritualistic practices, the members’ ‘higher-selves’ – their ‘guardian angels’ and other invisible ‘Elder Brothers’ – were seen as being able to attend to one’s spiritual ‘needs’ if not ‘wants’, and to all necessary personal development of the individual. Mary Robinson suggested that a constantly-transforming-self attuned to God was assured to those who sincerely did that which they knew was right, and avoided doing that which they knew was wrong. The focus on ‘New Selves’ was however a focus, even a preoccupation, of many of the countercultural alignees of the Robinsons. The conflicting priorities of the genuine need for creative-development and inner-growth (as in the ‘New Self’ focus), set against the practical infrastructure needs of the selfless and energy-insatiable ‘New Society’, was a key factor in the gradual disintegration of the group.

### **The UBI as a ‘New Family’**

Seen through the lens of a ‘New Family’ the Robinsons encouraged the concept of a ‘soul-group’ or ‘soul-family’. The idea that the group may have been together in past lives was seen as plausible but not as a tenet. This soul-family was seen as supplementing rather than replacing one’s birth-family and other filial links. Because the UBI actively welcomed the families of its members, often taking positive action to facilitate the healing of relationships between parents and their grown children, the

group did not arouse the ire of concerned relatives, as did groups which made ‘New Family’ their focus. Neither of the Robinsons saw themselves as surrogate parents with the Members as their children. While Mary Robinson did see the welfare of the individual Members and the survival of this ‘soul-family’ group as her responsibility, the focus on this ‘New Family’ was religious: The Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God.<sup>368</sup>

## **The Robinsons’ ‘New World’ and the UBI**

A ‘New World’ focus was perhaps as important to Fred and Mary Robinson as their ‘New Society’ focus. The Robinsons as early *New Age Pioneers* (both born before the First World War) were steeped in *Armageddon-and-Apocalypse-first scenarios*, which were to be followed by the ‘New Dispensation’ (the ‘Golden Age’, the ‘Millennium of Peace’, or the ‘New Age of Aquarius’). This ‘New World’ theme was for all its *newness* rooted in the Biblical ‘New Heaven and New Earth’ (Rev. 21:1) conception.

The Robinsons’ cultural-religious ‘New World’ theme was significantly out-of-step with countercultural baby-boomer ‘New Self’ focussed alignees. The incongruence between the Robinsons’ ‘New World’ focus and their alignees’ initial ‘New Selves’ focus was enough to cause ongoing *paradigm-irritation* during the functioning of the group. However, a ‘New Society’ focus from both the Robinsons and these alignees provided a bridge that largely spanned the cultural ‘generation gap’ – a gap that Fred always claimed to have bridged. The alignees traded their culturally inherited ‘new self’ focus with its inherent negative countercultural protesting, for a positive ‘new society’ supra-protest – building the ‘New Society’. The Robinsons sidelined their ideological insistence on the ‘end of the world’ delivery of the Aquarian ‘New World’, for the building of a ‘New Age’ Community in the here and now – Fred’s *Oahspean* goal and personal mission. While these trade-offs made for an often uneasy arrangement – one that was never understood enough to be talked about openly – it did serve to keep the group together for 15 years.

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<sup>368</sup> While the group was called a ‘Brotherhood’ and used the term ‘Fatherhood of God’ it simply did not have other culturally accessible terms that denoted ‘human siblinghood’ or ‘cosmic parenthood’ (terms that we didn’t even think about). The old terms were part of the Robinsons’ lexicon which we mainly followed. To have said, ‘the universal brotherhood and sisterhood of men and women, under the cosmic motherhood and fatherhood of God’ would have been just too hard.

## **The UBI and the Typological Matrix**

Along with his ‘New Understanding’ about UFOs, the alleged world-wide conspiracy, and imminent ecological disaster, Fred Robinson kept publicising his Armageddon/Apocalyptic ‘New World’ prophecies. As the obvious ‘figure head’ Fred made the UBI appear more like a ‘Doomsday Cult’ than a positive ‘New Society’ in the making. This public perception can now be seen as a cross which the Members bore. Rather than defining the *belief-focus* of the group, Fred’s prophecies defined the way the group was seen by the public. Most media commentators made the group appear as a ‘New World’ or ‘New Understandings’ group – for these were the most interesting interpretive frames in which to couch the movement and the later organisation. Occasionally the media engaged in an ‘everyday’ examination of the group – how it functioned on a practical level – and this allowed for the ‘New Society’ focus to surface.

## **On the UBI/Society Responses: A two-way feedback**

It is a (sometimes unfortunate) fact that revolutionary action is by nature urgent and imperative. A movement like the UBI started so quickly, mushrooming without infrastructure, trained personnel or a well thought-through plan. When impulsive decisions, couched as ‘intuitive knowing’, characterise a movement’s ascendancy phase, as in the UBI, it is not surprising that an impulsive mutiny or *coup-d’état* challenges a perceived authoritarian structure. Splits are bound to happen amongst followers courageous enough to align themselves with a countercultural stance in the first place.

In the UBI’s experience two major splits damaged the group. The first, in 1977, almost halved the group; however it not only survived the exodus of members but in many ways was strengthened. During the following nine year period a gradual re-acculturation to the mainstream occurred. This was to a degree resisted by the Robinsons, as *Oahspean separateness* was seen to be part of the vision. The reality however was that because the children of the Community liked to play tennis at the Balingup Lawn Tennis Club, many of us began socialising with the local people, and feeling good about the contact. Those who did not mix, except on *Brotherhood-*

*initiated-terms*, felt uncomfortable about this socialisation. Mary Robinson in particular discouraged close association with the local community, seeing such relationships as diminishing the potency of the ‘New Society’. Having said this, Mary made every endeavour to encourage a fulfilling social life for Members – but on UBI terms. Initiatives such as making the weekly ‘Fun Nights’ open to the locals, holding concerts and dances in the area, encouraging the formation of a folk and square dance band (*The Brotherhood Band*, which played at local events for a fee), were all designed to spread ‘The Consciousness’ and cater for social needs within the group. Despite the limited success of such outreach initiatives, the UBI could never be a realistic alternative to society.

In 1986 a number of the CentreCore including the Secretary (Rose Gilmore), the Community Treasurer, and Me (as Mary’s appointed ‘Principal’) became uncomfortable about Mary’s strong reaction against a consensus-driven decision to send our high-school children to the local school. We believed that we could not give these few children a satisfactory education and run a viable primary school and kindergarten at the same time. The UBI run *Steiner School* had been opened to the children of the district; and this was another contentious acculturating initiative. However, since ‘*the world*’ was coming into ‘*our world*’ it was seen as a service to the district, but nonetheless in Mary’s eyes it was viewed as a risky initiative.

When combined, these dilemmas escalated into a clash of decision-making paradigms more significant than the issues themselves. On one side democracy – for all its weaknesses – was seen as superior to a ‘harmonious agreement’, which amounted to theocratic rule: agreeing with Mary’s version of God’s guidance, which did not accept consensus-driven decisions if they were perceived as *out of the consciousness*. On the other side was the view that democracy – 51% versus 49% – was inferior to ‘Harmonious Agreement’, conceived as a spiritual alternative that acknowledged the place of ‘the Nucleus’ in the decision-making process (this was further complicated by my appointment as Principal). The *world’s way* of settling issues soon encroached on our little world, as both sides of the argument dove for the ‘world’s agreement’ – the legally registered constitution of the UBI.



The connection with the world around us was further accentuated during the early months of 1986, when the Philippines People Power Revolution modelled a form of consensual insurrection for the democratically aligned group within the UBI.<sup>369</sup> The issue of democracy was not to be easily resolved. The Community lived in a condition of hiatus for a few years, during which time three of the founding CentreCore members left (including me). This last split, along with Mary's passing in 1989, effectively ended the Universal Brotherhood as the Robinsons had conceived it.

The UBI history, being a micro-story of a largely forgotten Australian NRM, is relevant both to the macro-story of New Religious Movements in Australia, and in turn the future and development of religion and spirituality in Australia.

## **The Future of NRMs and Religion**

If the half century (since the 1960s) has been an 'earthquake' for members of NRMs, shaking them and their immediate families from culturally and theologically constrained ways of belief and worship, it is quite possible that the next fifty will see a religious earthquake in which religious innovation and reinvention shakes the fabric of the major religious institutions and of secular society itself. Fundamentalism of every religious persuasion has certainly reshaped the world since the political-religious terrorism of September 2001.

While the part religion will play in the future is contested (Davie, Heelas & Woodhead 2003) it is sure that youth have not forgotten religion/spirituality (Hughes 2004; Smith 2005). While Bouma points to a view that sees religion as being 'denatured by secularisation' (2006, p. 204) to the point where it is a 'passing fad practised by the few' (ibid.) he also notes that

religion and spirituality are living phenomena, rather like the societies that give them birth. As such they can be expected to grow, develop and evolve over time while retaining some recognisable continuity (Bouma 2006, p. 204).

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<sup>369</sup> The People Power Revolution was a series of popular nonviolent revolutions and prayerful mass street demonstrations in the Philippines that occurred in 1986, which marked the restoration of the country's democracy ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People\\_Power\\_Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People_Power_Revolution), accessed 8.3.2011). In recalling the concurrency of the two revolutions – one global, the other local – there is no implication that Mary Robinson was like Ferdinand or Imelda Marcos; it was more that 'people power', and the value of democracy were highlighted.

Definitions of religions and their social constructions are largely dependent on those religionists who have a stake in a particular form of religion. Others may be ‘blinded to what is happening to a society’s religious and spiritual life as are secularists who have a stake in the withering away of particular forms of religion’ (Bouma 2006, pp. 204–205). While some religions may lose currency, others are sure to fill any gaps in the religious marketplace. Which ones become central and which miss the trends and become sidelined will depend how they perform in regard to the motivators of religious and spiritual life.

All predictions are based on assumptions about the core drivers of the near future. These assumptions are grounded in perceptions of trends and theories of the overall direction of social and cultural change (Davie, Heelas & Woodhead 2003). The assessments of trends and the interpretations of theories are conditioned by the hopes and fears of those making the assessments and interpretations (Bouma 2006, p. 205).

Bouma assesses the core drivers in Australia as the human need for hope, increasing diversity and the rise of faith based education; he sees

... the needs addressed by religion and spirituality as core to humanity: hope and meaning grounded in a connection with that which is more than passing, partial and broken...

The most developed responses to the need for hope have been found in community life, expressed in religious symbols and rites, and nurtured through spiritualities. They are also found in storytelling, myth-making and the sharing of journeys... Hope demands that there be more than is seen, experienced, thought or enjoyed in the everyday...

Some will continue to find hope in the disciplines of a spirituality and the offerings of religious groups. Religion and Spirituality never engage everyone’s attention or commitment. I expect, however, that more will in the near future than did in near past. In Australia this will take forms that are quieter, less charismatic and more towards the low temperature end of the scale of religious intensity than elsewhere (2006, p. 205–206).

Bouma depicts the secularists and anti-clericals of the nineteen and twentieth century as having belittled religious responses to science as ‘immature humanity clinging to childish images and succours’, arguing that ‘mature humanity stood before the emptiness of space and experienced neither awe nor sense of wonder, just a non-responsive void’ (ibid., p. 206). Bouma’s response summarises the *‘hope’ core driver* of the religious/spiritual response, while also revealing the *‘grass-roots’ core driver* of new religious movements:

An uncaring and unresponsive universe provides little foundation for care for self, other, society or environment. Such a position is no longer tenable. The Universe is not empty; its interconnectedness is awesome, and solitary non-responsiveness not a satisfactory human stance. Moreover, ordinary people continue to report encounters, experiences and moments of insight that have convinced them of the presence of the beyond, the more than, the transcendent (Bouma 2006, p. 206–207).

‘Increasing diversity’, being the second major driver of religious and spiritual life in Australia will also increase competition in the religious marketplace. Such diversity, according to Bouma (2006, p. 207) is likely to produce more interest in religion and be more connected to the construction of identity.

Identities are grounded in similarity and set off by difference. If everyone is the same on a particular dimension it provides little traction for identity differentiation. Moreover, difference raises questions of how to understand the differences and relate. As a result of diversity religion is on the social agenda. People are discussing it. As interfaith activities bring differing groups into contact, each will ask questions of the other... Diversity promotes religious vitality (ibid., p. 207).

Religious diversity stimulated by immigration and discussed in a multi-faith setting may make dialogue between NRMs and the main strands of religion more possible. Dialogue between NRMs, when held in a spirit of friendly appreciation of similarity and difference, rather than in ‘anticult’ or ‘intercult’ antagonism, will help to normalise NRMs. The experience of the UBI’s interaction with Catholic priests certainly softened the UBI’s attitude to the Catholic Church and, via the priests’ acceptance of us, the local congregation’s attitude towards us, and ultimately our attitudes to them – ‘the world’. Dialogue – getting to know each other as people – makes ‘difference’ much more acceptable. Interfaith and multifaith groups, started in Australia during the 1980s as part of *multicultural understanding*, are growing in Australia and worldwide.<sup>370</sup> These organisations, non-existent during the functioning of the UBI, are poised to play an important part in the integration of NRMs through face-to-face religious/spiritual networks of established churches and the acculturating NRMs – the ‘cults’ of the nineteenth and twentieth-century. Such multifaith groups have the capacity of assisting the new religious movements of the twenty-first century.

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<sup>370</sup> Some of these organisations have registered with a body that represents and provides links to interfaith/multifaith organisations worldwide (see <http://interfaithorganisations.net/member-organisations/>, accessed 19.5.2011).

Bouma's third major driver of Australia's religious and spiritual life is the rise of faith-based education. While the larger, older and elite private schools founded in the nineteenth-century tend to be focussed on training the next generation of corporate and professional leaders,

the fastest growing segment of Australian independent schools takes the mandate to educate in faith-grounded values and to offer excellent education that prepares the whole person, including the spiritual person. Catholics have done this from the 1870s, and now other groups are seeing the provision of religiously informed education as a way of growing the next generation of Christians, Muslims, Jews and others.

The short term impact of the rise of faith-based education will be a cohort of religiously articulate young people who have a much more developed sense of their spirituality than previous generations. They will be more demanding and sophisticated consumers in the religious marketplace (Bouma 2006, p. 207).

Youth today engage with yoga and a variety of martial arts that feed into meditative spiritual practices. Some are entering religious communities, while new religious orders are founded.

These movements reflect the revitalisation of religion and offer opportunities to those who want a high-demand religion that structures their lives and channels their talents into service to those in need. Some people seem to be seeking communal ways to nurture their spiritual lives and put their faith into practice (Bouma 2006, p. 210).

Spiritually based communities are bound to (re)occur in conjunction with a constantly changing society. Eclectic grass-roots movements akin to the Robinsons' 'Alternative Society', perhaps even based on some of the 'cosmic laws' and New Age information which they promoted to the baby-boomer generation, will be rearticulated to spawn new religious movements which blend different religious traditions, mixing elements of spirituality with cultural trends: 'In postmodernity we can expect what has been called bricolage, the piecing together of cultural elements drawn from a variety of sources' (Bouma 2006 p. 211).

The mixing of spiritual streams with a matching of cultural trends will create hybrids that will in turn infiltrate society and subtly change it, in much the same way I suggest the Robinsons did in Australia during the 1960s and '70s and much of the '80s. Perhaps a sector of youth will again make a dash for more meaning. Once broadband has become instantaneous and the communication and information highways have reached

virtual destinations, perhaps young people will in greater numbers use such technologies to explore eternal questions via their social networks. Many are already asking spiritually charged questions, while protesting against a plethora of economic, environmental, climate change and *save-the-planet* issues. As Bouma suggests, there are many youth today who are already inquiring into spirituality.

Studies of youth spirituality (Singleton, Mason & Webber 2004; Mason, Webber & Singleton 2005; Smith 2005; Hughes 2004b) are finding that many youth take their spirituality seriously; many seek traditional forms in religious organisations while others take a more do-it-yourself approach (Bouma 2006, p. 211).

It is likely that youth will demand a different periodicity in their religions. High intensity experiences such as pilgrimages and festivals, followed by dormant periods, are more likely. Weekly events, especially Sunday mornings, are not popular with youth (Dixon & Bond 2004). But there will always be those who seek, for a variety of reasons, an intense, ongoing commitment to a religious/spiritual ideal. Some of these people will form movements which will coalesce into organised groups to meet this need. They may have some culturally 'strange' ideas and theories about the universe and 'different' lifestyles. Such religious/spiritual living and social experimentation can be seen as a benefit to society, as well as providing an environment in which people grow. As long as laws are not broken and members not abused, and as long as members of the larger society are not physically threatened, NRMs could become more *part-of*, rather than *apart-from* civilised society – and society may become more civilised as a result of such socio-religious groups. How society encourages and enables, investigates and disallows such NRMs are questions which were always lurking beneath and behind this study.

Ray and Anderson (2000) point to a 'hole in the culture' regarding *Cultural Creatives*.<sup>371</sup> It is useful to see the Robinsons and *consciousness movement* NRMs like the UBI, as similar to the situation of generation after generation of women artists and writers:

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<sup>371</sup> Cultural Creatives is a term coined by sociologist Paul H. Ray and psychologist Sherry Ruth Anderson to describe a large segment in Western society that has recently developed beyond the standard paradigm of Modernists or Progressives versus Traditionalists or Conservatives. The concept was presented in their book *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 million People are Changing the World* (2000), where they claim to have found that 50 million adult Americans (slightly over one quarter of the adult population) can now be identified as belonging to this group. They estimated that there were an additional 80–90 million Cultural Creatives in Europe as of 2000 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural\\_Creatives](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_Creatives), accessed 30.5.2011).

No one had passed on the history of women's own accounts of what they had created and thought over the centuries, so to each new generation of women, it was as if none of that important work had ever been done. Cultural Creatives today must also constantly invent and reinvent the basic supports for the way they want to live. It takes up a lot of time and energy, and predicably because many of the issues are new, there is a great deal of confusion and conflict (Ray & Anderson 2000, p. 186).

The insider positioning of the experimental initiatives within the *consciousness movement* – along with the biographies of their culturally creative founders and their accomplishments – are often 'lost' in the overriding *hegemonically inspired* secular critique of the movements. Such critiques preference the secular over the religious; the material over the spiritual, and the capitalist (competition oriented) society over an alternative communal (cooperatively oriented) society.

Cultural models such as the UBI and many of the modern NRM groups since the 1960s (including those which had disastrous ends) have been critiqued under the weight of the 'cult' stereotype – both anti-religious and religious. In this way much insider history has been lost. However, much remains 'buried' in ambivalent memories, and archives that sit in garages ready to be exhumed in research such as this. NRMs make mistakes, but ones often incited by societal misunderstanding of the motives and plans of the groups – fear, suspicion and sensation tending to spearhead enquiry in the domains of theology, psychology and media interrogations. Sociology, cultural studies and multifaith/pluralist historical religious studies offer a more balanced understanding of these Cultural Creatives.

In each case, what has developed is an understanding of the degree to which multiple interpretations of a given event, experience, or even, as in this case, a whole life or Community, are contested: twisted about, as the era which reports or interprets them requires different meanings, drawn from the sequence of actions. For Bakhtin, this capacity for semantic reformation is an inherent quality of language itself:

... at any given moment of its historical existence, language is hetroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form. These "languages" of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying "languages" (Bakhtin 1994, p. 291).

Many such ‘typifying languages’ have intersected in this exposition of the braided-lives of Fred and Mary Robinson. Presenting an *insider/participant/emic* history woven through my now *outsider/observer/etic* perspective has been the challenge of this study.

That the Robinsons’ history should be told has been the motivating imperative. Ultimately however, this drive to fill this hole in the history of the Australian, New Age, Back-to-the-land Communitarian movement has uncovered an even larger hole in the literature regarding the emplotment of ‘cults’. The story of the Robinsons helps inform the way such movements develop, but also how they are culturally positioned. This is, to that extent, already a long story – but one which is likely, at many levels, *to be continued*.





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## Appendices

Electronic Appendix 1: ABC 'The Brotherhood', *Compass* (Critchley 2009).

Electronic Appendix 2: ABC 'A New Breed of Farmers', *Four Corners* (Young 1971).

Electronic Appendix 3 ABC 'Fred Robinson', *GTK* (Cannon 1971).

Print Appendix 1: Time Line

Print Appendix 2: Relevant Photographs and Ephemera



## Print Appendix 1 Time-Line

This time-line has been included to help make clear at a glance what happened when in the lives of the protagonists, and to show how ideas and events intersected and appeared to produce cause-and-effect alignments.

### Formative Phase of Founders

- 1848: The year of the Hydesville Rappings; 31<sup>st</sup> March, regarded as the start of Modern Spiritualism; the date *Oahspe* declares as the start of Kosmon Era; the date Fred Robinsons tells 1970s New Agers *that Modern Revealed Knowledge began flooding the planet.*
- 1865: 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 'Max' Heindel born.
- 1881: John Ballou Newbrough writes *Oahspe*; it is published the following year.
- 1882: *Oahspe: A Kosmon Bible* is published.
- 1883: Convention of 'Faithists': Utopian Community for children is planned.
- 1884: The Shalam Colony established in Southern New Mexico.
- 1885: 5<sup>th</sup> May, Ruth Eda 'Ione' Long born.
- 1891: 22<sup>nd</sup> April, John Newbrough dies at 'Shalam – Children's Home' and Fred Robinson born in Liverpool; Second edition of *Oahspe* is published.
- 1894: 13<sup>th</sup> November, William Henry 'Parcæ' Long born.
- 1901: Shalam Colony is closed after 17 years of functioning – about the same life-cycle as the UBI (1971–1988).
- 1905: Fred Robinson visits Isle of Man.
- 1910: Fred Robinson jumps ship with friend Sam Baillie at Circular Quay in Sydney.
- 1912: 15<sup>th</sup> April, *Titanic* sinks, Fred (21) becomes a student of this disaster, using the story as an analogy for end-of-the-world from the 1930s until his death.
- 1913: 25<sup>th</sup> June, Mary O'Dwyer (Broun-Robinson) born in Perth.
- 1914: 14<sup>th</sup> January, Alice Dean and Fred Robinson married with Georgina Dean and Sam Baillie in double wedding at St Michaels, New Farm; War breaks out; Fred works on the land; no evidence that Fred was a conscientious objector.
- 1917: Fred and Alice Robinson at Bli Bli sugar farm raising a family.
- 1923: Parcæ Long moves to Queensland to find other 'naturists'.
- 1925: September, 'The Forum' is instituted for the study of the Urantia Papers.
- 1927: Long undertakes 'extensive Educational Work' promoting gymnosophy.
- 1929: October, Wall Street Stock Market crash.
- 1930: Fred Robinson focussed on understanding why he was losing his farm; Family lives in rough camp house at Lake Weyba (Noosa, Queensland).
- 1932: Fred Robinson fully involved in Douglas Credit movement.
- 1933: Mary O'Dwyer marries Clem Broun at Coorow Western Australia; Fred Robinsons family living at Lake Weyba bartering while Fred is studying.
- 1935: Mary first son, Noel Broun, born in Coorow; The *Jesus Papers* 'delivered' as part of the *Urantia Forum* in Chicago.
- 1936: Fred Robinson investigates Rosicrucian Order of the Aquarians (ROTA) at Borva Street, Dutton Park, Brisbane.
- 1937: Mary's second son Ivan Broun, born in Coorow; Fred joins ROTA and runs a bakery delivery business from the Borva Street 'Silver Domed Temple'.

- 1939: ROTA shifts its headquarters to Brown Plains; ROTA buys property for Queensland Gymnosophical Society (QGS).
- 1940: Borva Street Temple in disarray – taken over by squatters.
- 1942: 31<sup>st</sup> May, last official meeting of Urantia Book group ‘The Forum’.
- 1943: 25<sup>th</sup> April, Fred Robinson ordained as a priest of ROTA.
- 1945: End of War signals new start for ROTA, plans accelerate to form an Aquarian Community of about 100 people.
- 1946: Borva Street Temple begins to be disassembled.
- 1947: Kenneth Arnold’s sighting of an unidentified flying object: the term ‘flying saucer’ is popularised; Great hopes for ROTA’s future.
- 1948: Clem and Mary Broun move from Coorow to Carlisle in Perth; ROTA publishes *Summerland Scenes* as prospectus for European naturists.
- 1949: *Summerland Scenes* attracts up to 20 European naturist immigrants to Queensland Gymnosophical Community – none stay.
- 1950: January *Health and Efficiency* (UK) battles with Parcae Long; 3<sup>rd</sup> March Ione Long suicides; adverse publicity for ROTA; Urantia Foundation inaugurated to oversee publishing of *Urantia Book*.
- 1951: Fred first leaves ROTA to become a ‘wandering sage’ lecturer; Mary’s youngest son, Graham Broun, born in Carlisle.
- 1952: Fred focuses on reading *Oahspe Book*; becomes a celebrant of the Kosmon Church during the rest of the decade.
- 1953: Fred is staying at ROTA when Parcae Long is arrested.
- 1955: *The Urantia Book* is published by the Urantia Foundation in October; floods destroy ROTA archives at Browns Plains.
- 1956: Fred reads *Urantia Book* and begins importing boxes of the first edition.
- 1960: Ivan and Noel Broun start a youth club in Coorow.
- 1961: 14<sup>th</sup> March Fred Robinson talks to combined meeting of Flying Saucer Research Society and South Australian Vegetarian Society; Fred Stone reports to South Australian Police and ASIO (Australian Security Intelligence Organisation) and a file is created; 13<sup>th</sup> June, Ivan Broun, aged 24, dies in a car accident; Mary makes Spiritualist contact with him; 13<sup>th</sup> November, Richard Graves ‘receives’ the first of the ‘Universal Link’ prophecies.

## **Inception Phase of Community**

- 1962: 4<sup>th</sup> February, Fred Robinson observes a partial eclipse of Sun from Cairns, with planets lined-up in Aquarius – the event is thought to be the dawn of the Age of Aquarius; in May, Clem and Mary Broun agree to separate; Fred in Melbourne in October early November; he travels to Western Australia and talks at Seekers Centre; 13<sup>th</sup> November, Fred stays at Mary Broun’s home; Findhorn Community in Northern Scotland begun by Peter and Eileen Caddy and Dorothy Maclean.
- 1963: Fred and Mary buy Shalam; 3<sup>rd</sup> September, Parcae Long dies.
- 1964: 20<sup>th</sup> June, Mary Broun sets out on a 38 day round-the-world ‘Linking Mission’ with other New Age Centres in England, America and New Zealand; Mary meets Fred in Melbourne for ‘duet lectures’ 18<sup>th</sup> July, Mary returns to Perth via Adelaide; 2<sup>nd</sup> August, Sydney Cadman (Fred’s second teacher) dies; October, *The Laws of Life and How to Live Them* is published.
- 1965: The Robinsons become interested in Ogamisama, a Japanese Prophet.
- 1966: January, Alex Langhof (Ogamisama’s ‘envoy’) visits Shalam; February Mary visits Ogamisama’s Temple of Peace in Hon-bu, Japan; 13<sup>th</sup> August, Mary

Broun and Fred Robinson are married; they embark on a 'honeymoon lecture tour'; *Religions in Australia* (van Sommers) published, with a Chapter titled *Shalam – The New Age*.

- 1967: Fred and Mary Robinson undertake what they call a 'Last Roundup' lecture tour, proclaiming Universal Link's prophecy that the world would be changed on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December through a process of 'nuclear evolution'.
- 1968: Fred Robinson considering retirement – The Robinsons seek to 'pass on the torch' to other Centres of Light in Perth; 14<sup>th</sup> October an earthquake felt at Shalam.
- 1969: Lecture tour of country Western Australia focusing on the part of flying saucers.
- 1970: Fred speaks at Australia's first successful 'Pop Festival', 24<sup>th</sup>–25<sup>th</sup> January in Ourimbah NSW; Death of Alice Robinson, née Dean; Stephen Carthew starts the 'Universal Foundation', a New Age Information Centre at Bayview and corresponds with Anthony Brooke and Peter Caddy from Findhorn.

### **Ascendency Phase of Fred Robinson:**

- 1971: On 5<sup>th</sup> July Fred leaves on investigation tour of Easter States; arrives in Sydney in early September and speaks at Sydney Town Hall on 31<sup>st</sup> October; speaks at Myer Music Bowl in Melbourne on 7<sup>th</sup> November; Adelaide Town Hall; returns to Perth; 17<sup>th</sup> December Stephen Carthew and Louise Feneley married by Fred Robinson at Shalam (19<sup>th</sup> December, formally married at Registry Office).
- 1972: 1<sup>st</sup> January, Stephen and Louise Carthew and a small group start a Community on Noel Broun's property Carranya; honeymoon (recruitment drive) to Queensland and back by the Carthews; the first Community group leaves while Carthews are away; Shalam set up as a half-way house and training centre for all Seekers.
- 1973: 12<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> May, Aquarian Festival at Nimbin; ex-attendees arrive at Carranya soon after this event and the Carranya Community quickly mushrooms.

### **Ascendency Phase of the Community**

- 1974: School started at Carranya; Concerts in local towns of Coorow and Carnamah; Fred, Mary and Stephen lecture tour to Queensland (Fred contacted by a grandchild), they visit Richard and Coral Robinson at ROTA; Universal Brotherhood formally becomes Incorporated (1<sup>st</sup> October) with Mary Robinson as Principal; dietary policy changed to include fish, although Fred remains vegetarian; Community leaves Carranya under difficult circumstances; Shalam is sold with money set aside for purchase of a new property; Members live in Perth earning money and saving to buy new property; focus group looks for and finds suitable property; Balingup Property (317 acres) secured Christmas Eve – called *Urantia*; railway carriages trucked down as temporary accommodation; houses rented in Greenbushes (7kms. away) to house Members.
- 1975: Membership about 60 plus children; management group expands and new timetables are established; a truck transports members from local town of Greenbushes daily to set up property as a Community.
- 1976: A legalised Caravan Park is established on property; dams constructed; house built for Fred and Mary Robinson; Community school continues with Education Department approval; large garden established and crops of oats and hay are grown; goats, sheep, chickens, ducks, and bees are raised; concert performances by UBI for local district.

1977: 71 members and 42 children live on property; pug mill bought for making mud bricks; silo installed to store crops of rye, barley and oats; due to presence of 40 caravans and 5 chalets the Donnybrook Council requires building of an amenities block; Julia Fenderson visits – as a Trustee of Urantia Foundation asks group not to use name Urantia – Community reluctantly agrees; the group subsequently becomes known as the ‘The Brotherhood’ or ‘UBI’, while the property is often called ‘The Homestead’; in second half of year a schism causes half the members to leave; the Montessori Education system is used in the school.

## **Stabilising Phase of the Community**

- 1978: 4<sup>th</sup> April, Cyclone Alby comes through UBI Community– only one roof blown off; an amenities block is opened with all the Local Council invited; ‘Breakthrough Demolition’ company is formed; oxidation pond made; Community visited by Peter and Eileen Caddy from Findhorn; American cinematographer Deacon Chapin and crew shoot feature length film about the UBI; 18<sup>th</sup> November, 918 people die in murder suicide at the Jim Jones founded People’s Temple Community, Jonestown, Guyana.
- 1979: 24 Members living at property; rental set at one tenth the state minimum wage (\$40); clause on standards is added to the UBI Constitution; quorum changed from 20 to one-third of Members; policy on diet changed to include chicken; Community become involved in local district activities; .
- 1980: 23 Members; electricity being connected; groups of high school children come on excursion; Community provides only the evening meal.
- 1981: Number of children in ratio to adults is increasing; school building extended; folk music group the ‘Brotherhood Band’ starts up; Education Department recognises ‘efficiency status’ and application made for a Schools Commission Grant.
- 1982: Dietary policy changed to include red meat; Fred still adamantly vegetarian; Community focus on education; UBI school committee explores Rudolf Steiner/Waldorf Education; Mary writes the third person autobiographical reflections, *Divine Destinies*.
- 1983: 11<sup>th</sup> April, Fred Robinson dies (just before his 92<sup>nd</sup> birthday); UBI School has 16 pupils, 2 pre-primary and 6 kindergarten children; teachers do training in Steiner Education.
- 1984: Mary resigns as Principal and appoints Stephen Carthew to take over the role, but remains an honorary member of CentreCore; focus of Community work is on the school; decision made to send the UBI students of high school age to the local Donnybrook High School – Mary unhappy about this; farming only cows for milk; milking by roster; one of two large dams has capacity increased; almost 500 kilograms of honey extracted from Community bee hives.
- 1985: School takes in children from the local district and there are non-Member teacher aides; Rudolf Steiner philosophy increasingly popular amongst most parents; workshops for held at UBI school; the School Committee seeks a separate legal entity for the School – a requirement to become a registered ‘Waldorf School’; a new management structure ‘The College of Teachers’ set up to run the school separately from the UBI Community; wages paid to one of the in-house teachers – until then all teaching had been an unpaid voluntary service



of UBI members; Mary and some UBI members strongly disagree with direction being taken.

- 1986: Communication breakdown – great difficulty arriving at any major decisions; AGM called, only 15 members attend, 7 absent; proposals made: to give separate status to school; to change name to ‘The Homestead’ Community; existing rules and precepts be rescinded; that management have no special powers and decisions made democratically. A Special General Meeting late in year proposes: 12 acres of property go to ‘Balinga Valley School’ (as it is then called); minutes sent to Department of Corporate Affairs; some Members call the Community the Universal Brotherhood, others call it the Homestead Community.
- 1987: A public notice in local press announces name change of ‘Universal Brotherhood’ to ‘Homestead Community’; a counter public notice by Mary Robinson asserts ‘Universal Brotherhood’ is still the legal name; although the UBI quorum was changed in 1979 from 20 to 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of Members, the appropriate minutes of these changes were not forwarded to Corporate Affairs, rendering the change invalid – quorum cannot be achieved; rent no longer paid to Community but each household covers rates and insurances etc; AGM is not held as UBI considers itself ‘in suspension’; more foundation families leave.
- 1988: Two more families leave; Mary Robinson discovers she has terminal cancer; Mary writes the third person autobiographical sketch used in this study.
- 1989: 2<sup>nd</sup> February, Mary Robinson dies at age 76; the kindergarten continues but older grades are closed down; the whole school closes at the end of year with assets donated to Perth Steiner School; no AGM held as the UBI still considers itself legally ‘in suspension’.

## **Retrospective Phase of UBI**

- 1990: Fred’s oldest son Richard Robinson dies; the required quorum of 20 is greater than the resident Members (10) with an equal number of non-Member residents; 7 founding Members have left since 1987; attempts are made to update UBI’s internal housing by-laws; a herd of beef cattle and an apple orchard are still maintained.
- 1991: Corporate Affairs inform UBI that since the 1987 Associations Act there had been no provision for ‘suspension’, and that unless the association were to be conducted in accordance with the UBI Constitution the ‘wind-up’ provisions would be imposed; permanent residents were granted Membership and a quorum was achieved; the UBI Constitution was totally rewritten and the UBI’s legal status was (re)established; an ABC retrospective for Landline interviews members and ex-members visiting at the time.
- 1994: The ‘Universal Brotherhood Incorporated’ has its name changed to Brooklands Community Inc.
- 1998: Katarzyna Dziewialtowska-Gintowt interviews past UBI Members for the West Australian Oral History Collection – master copies deposited at State Library of Western Australia (Battye Library).
- 2004: Stephen Carthew’s Honours Thesis on Fred Robinson begun; University of South Australia film crew shoots at UBI locations Shalam (Armadale), Carranya (Coorow) and Brooklands Community (Balingup); Carolyn Bilsborow produces *The Calling*, a film about Fred Robinson.

- 2006: 30<sup>th</sup> July, Norman Aisbett's feature article, 'Universal Brotherhood: How a Hippie Dream Fell Apart, published in *West Australian*; Carolyn Bilsborow's Honours Thesis 'Interactive Spaces for Story: Developing a New Media Documentary' completed, including a web-documentary artefact, *This Adventure*, about the Universal Brotherhood's music, featuring ex-UBI members David McAloney and blues singer Matt Taylor.
- 2007: Batty Library accepts major UBI archive from Margaret Miskimmin as Secretary of the Brooklands Community; Laurie Critchley begins filming a 'social history documentary' on the UBI.
- 2008: Reunion in the home of Linda Moctezuma (née Ward) in Sydney is filmed for ABC's *Compass* documentary; archival material filmed in 1978 is retrieved from Deacon Chapin's estate and digitised by ABC.
- 2009: 22<sup>nd</sup> March, screening of Laurie Critchley's 'The Brotherhood', as the first in a series of 21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary programmes for *Compass*, ABC's premier religious programme; A Web Site, <[www.fredrebinson.net.au](http://www.fredrebinson.net.au)>, is constructed as an artefact for Stuart Dinmore's PhD: 'The Real Online: Imagining the Future of Documentaries', University of South Australia. The content includes archival material on Fred and Mary Robinson and the Universal Brotherhood Thesis,
- 2011: Carolyn Bilsborow's PhD, 'Inside the Screen: Engaging the Contemporary Documentary Audience', includes a documentary artefact, 'Inside the Brotherhood Reel' which employs data about the UBI; Stephen Carthew's PhD Thesis 'A World Within a World Within "The World"' submitted for examination.
- 2012: Carolyn Bilsborow finishes artefact *Inside the Brotherhood Reel* and publishes it online at <<https://vimeo.com/41264940>>; Stephen Carthew finalises changes to PhD and submits final copy on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 2012.

## **Print Appendix 2: Relevant Photographs and Ephemera**

The following photographs and other illustrative data have been provided in a separate print appendix with its own page numbers. As some of the photographs may have copyright issues this section will not be included in the in the electronic version of the thesis.