



Gathering at the start of the Peace Walk



One word often associated with social harmony is 'tolerance'. When it comes to creating an harmonious society, however, tolerance can be thought of as passive and reactionary rather than active and responsive, a fragile basis for good community relationships. It can be easily undermined by suspicion and fear when whole groups of people are stereotyped or stigmatised because of their religion, ethnicity, nationality or other designated 'difference'. When this happens, previously 'tolerant' people can easily condone acts of abuse and violence, even if they don't engage in such acts themselves.

BWCP members are committed to moving beyond tolerance, building deep, mutual respect, understanding and appreciation across faiths and cultures. We value opportunities to develop interpersonal relationships based on what we have in common, while at the same time accepting people's right to be different and learning to live with 'otherness' on a face-to-face basis.

The importance of an active, rights-based perspective is captured in the words of Eleanor Roosevelt, one of the leading figures in the initiation and framing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

*Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world... Such are the places where every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere.*

Editor

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## Harmony Day 2005

By far the most challenging activities undertaken by BWCP in its short history were two public events in Brisbane city to commemorate national Harmony Day.

### Women's Peace Walk

**20 March, the eve of Harmony Day**

According to the media release issued by BWCP to announce the walk, a key motivation for this event was to 'present an alternative to the widely held perception of religious faiths as a major source of division, conflict and violence in our world.' In the words of Mia Leigh, Chair of the Steering Committee: 'Mutual respect for one another's faiths and appreciation for the deeply human values that we hold in common are essential for our human future together, locally and globally'.

At the opening ceremony



*Continued from page 1*

'As we visit places of worship, share prayer and reflections on peace from diverse faith and spiritual traditions, gather more people along the route, walk and talk together, we will strengthen our own hope and conviction and invite a change of vision and attitude within the wider community'. Inspired by this vision BWCP organised and undertook a five-hour peace walk to commemorate Harmony Day.

Up to 120 women, men and children – BWCP members, families, friends, members of other supporting organisations – took place in the walk, dropping in and out as time and opportunity allowed. The atmosphere throughout the journey was friendly and joyful. Our two police 'minders' were soon part of the group. The sight of two male participants taking turns to carry the BWCP banner attracted amazed looks from bystanders at one point on the way!

The high points of the walk were the poignant moments of sharing on the theme of peace from a range of faiths and spiritual traditions at the various stopping points. Readings and prayers from sacred texts, ritual chants, songs and movements drew participants into the spirit of the walk and provided the momentum to continue when energy began to flag. 'Wonderful! Let's do it again next year – though maybe not quite so long!' was the final comment of many participants.



*Councillor Judy Magub at the opening ceremony with Mia Leigh*



*Joan Henriks shares a reflection on Indigenous spirituality in Musgrave Park.*

### **One walker's impressions**

'Bright orange clothing was the order of the day, and around us, intensifying the atmosphere of excitement, danced and floated balloons of the same colour. After the opening ceremony we were off, walking over the Victoria Bridge to St Mary's Church in South Brisbane. Cathy and Mugi from the Baha'i faith led us in a beautiful prayer for unity.

We then made our way to the West End Islamic Centre. In the mosque, Sitti from Indonesia reverently read texts from the Qu'ran that taught respect and tolerance for religious differences. Taking our departure, we next visited and prayed at the nearby Uniting and Greek Orthodox Churches.

It was now time for lunch and a rest under the shade of trees in Musgrave Park – a place where, from time immemorial, as Joan Hendriks, an elder from the Indigenous community of Stradbroke Island, reminded us, Brisbane's Indigenous peoples have gathered.

After a leisurely lunch, we continued our walk, stopping first at St Andrew's Anglican Church and then via South Bank onto the middle of the Goodwill Bridge. There a simple and lovely Hindu ceremony took place. Everyone offered flowers to the Divinity by casting them into the river, while Premala Prasher intoned an ancient, sacred chant.

Now, on the last leg of the walk, we moved into the old Botanical Gardens. The shadows were beginning to creep over them and the mysterious atmosphere was further enhanced when we turned a corner and came upon a group of kneeling, chanting Buddhists who were there specially to welcome us. What a magical experience!

After this, the walk being finished, we gathered on a still sunny section of the lawn to listen to peace songs sung by Iraqi children and their schoolmates in Brisbane schools. Our day concluded with a group exercise of forming a spiral and breathing in unison, ending in a great shout of joy!' *Michaela Easton.*

## Other activities of members

### **Heaven on Earth video screening** **Suncorp Piazza, South Bank Parklands** **21 March, Harmony Day**

Advertised as, *Glimpses of 'Heaven on Earth': a global window onto the rich diversity of faith traditions within the Brisbane community*, this is a series of 6 programmes produced by a company in Wales and broadcast in Australia on SBS. It covers primal religions, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. As a joint venture with South Bank Corporation and using their huge screen, the event was directed at passers-by and students from the nearby tertiary institutions.

The Piazza was decorated with Harmony Day orange streamers and *Living in Harmony* and Harmony Day posters. Members of BWCP were present to talk with people who stopped to view the screening and to hand out ribbons and the *Living in Harmony* brochure.

**3 & 4 March:** Christine Fensham and Wendy Flannery provided an information presence at the Women's Festival of Ideas into Action, Brisbane Powerhouse.

**5 March:** BWCP family picnic in the City Botanic Gardens to celebrate International Women's Day.

**13 March:** Nooreen Harris and Mojgan Vafaei hosted a celebration of Navruz, the Shia Muslim New Year, at the Harris home.

**21 March:** On behalf of BWCP, Mia Leigh contributed to a Harmony Day interfaith reflection and prayer event at the Multi-Faith Centre, Griffith University

**30 March:** Wendy Flannery represented BWCP at an interfaith event of Yoga in Daily Life, on the occasion of a visit of their founder, H.H. Paramhans Swami Maheshwarananda.

**31 March:** BWCP representatives Mia Leigh and Wendy Flannery attended the official opening of the Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Queensland.

**1 April:** Fifteen BWCP members participated in a workshop on the process of incorporating BWCP as a public not-for-profit association, conducted by Margaret Endicott, an organisational management consultant.

**1 – 3 April:** Five BWCP members participated in the conference, Justice, Peace and Reconciliation in the Asia-Pacific Region, organised by the Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, UQ.

**4 April:** Book club discussion of *Reading Lolita in Teheran* by Azar Nafisi.

**9 April:** An open planning meeting was held to develop a schedule of events and activities for the rest of 2005.

**South Bank**  
always creating

21 march 2005  
**harmony day**

**Glimpses of 'Heaven on Earth':**  
a global window onto the rich  
diversity of faith traditions  
within the Brisbane community

Screening of a video series showcasing the  
symbols and rituals of a variety of faiths in  
different cultural settings, first shown on  
Australian television by SBS in 2004.

Share the vision of Harmony Day by  
taking a moment to relax and enjoy this  
outstanding programme.

Venue: **Suncorp Piazza, South Bank Parklands**  
Date & time: **21 March, 11.00am – 3.00pm**

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living in harmony  
Australians Living in Harmony

**BELIEVING WOMEN**  
for a Culture of Peace

**S4C-  
WORLDWIDE  
INTERNATIONAL**  
Supplied courtesy of S4C International

## Member profiles



**Phyllis Johnson**

I was brought up in a very dedicated Methodist family, but I always felt drawn to mix with people from other Christian denominations – even though at high school, as a member of Crusaders, I thought that I had to pray for the Catholics to become real Christians!! I guess my belief was pretty fundamentalist for a while; but marriage, children and teaching all helped to open up my world to other ways of thinking, living and believing.

In 1993, two years after being diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, I retired from teaching. My search for other ways to be involved with people led me to places that further opened up my mind and spirit. I became involved in the Ecumenical Movement and Lifeline telephone counseling.

Believing Women for a Culture of Peace attracted me at a time when I felt a need to connect with people of Islamic faith. I have found that the basis of most religions is love and respect for God and people; but we so often complicate the simplicity of our religion. Probably this is because love and respect are more easily talked about than lived out!!

I belong to Broadwater Road Uniting Church, Wishart, where we are encouraged to live out our faith in the community and to be open to the new things God is always doing. We are reminded of our link with the Islamic community by the olive tree given to us by that community soon after 'September 11'; it is growing well!!



**Mugiarti Bennett**

I was born in Indonesia many years ago on the island of Java, into a unique culture influenced by many religions. As a child I lived with my family in a village in a peaceful and safe environment, where everybody knew, helped and supported everybody else. I followed the customs and laws of the religion of Islam like my parents, who also continued to practice more ancient Javanese religious rituals.

When I graduated as a primary school teacher I moved to a big city where I could really spread my wings and experience a sense of independence. There I heard about the Baha'i faith from my uncle and after a long period of investigation I embraced this new faith. Later I met my future husband, also a Baha'i, a university teacher from Australia. In the early 1980's we emigrated to Australia and a new chapter of my life began.

There are great cultural contrasts between Australia and Indonesia, and I struggled for a long time to adapt and integrate into this new environment. Having lived here now for 25 years, I am happy to call Australia home, proud to be Australian, and proud to belong to the Baha'i community.

What I enjoy most is to socialise with other people and make friends. I joined BWCP to meet new people and to spread the idea of unity in diversity. I hope to continue being a supportive part of this group and I pray for its endeavours to make a better world, especially today when we are facing so many crises.

## Upcoming events 2005

**7 May:** Presentation and dialogue session on *Developing a Peace-Building Identity*, led by Dr Winnifred Louis, School of Psychology, University of Queensland.

**22 May:** BWCP General Meeting for decision-making on the incorporation process.

**22 May:** Dialogue session on Buddhism.

**31 May:** Panel discussion for Reconciliation Week, entitled *Reconciliation: the Next Step?*, co-sponsored by BWCP.

**19 June:** Public women's interfaith ceremony organised by BWCP for World Refugee Day.

**25 & 26 June:** BWCP weekend retreat, on the theme of *Creation/ environment*.

## Special commemoration

**25 May:** National Day of Healing, followed by Reconciliation Week

**20 June:** World Refugee Day

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