

GREAT EXPECTATIONS? - Lyanne Mitchell - GUC 28th March 2010

As many of you know, I sing with a large community choir called, 'Sounds International' which has charitable status and performs in support of many good causes. Our talented conductor & Musical Arranger, Eddie Binnie, formed the choir to break down barriers of faith and creed, using music. 'Sounds International' is a multi ethnic, multi faith, community choir. In ethos it has much in common with our Unitarian beliefs and aspirations. Eddie has **great expectations** for us....he hopes that we may be invited to sing for the Commonwealth Games when they come to Glasgow. He believes. *"If we aim for a star, we might just reach the moon!"*

Life is all about expectations really - the creation of expectationsself-induced and induced by others. The reaction to expectationsby yourself and by others. And in so many areas.....relationships, financial matters, academic achievement.

Do you remember the Sinatra song....?

*'Just what makes that little old ant
Think he'll move that rubber tree plant
Anyone knows an ant, can't
Move a rubber tree plant*

*But he's got high hopes, he's got high hopes
He's got high apple pie, in the sky hopes*

*So any time your gettin' low
'stead of lettin' go
Just remember that ant
Oops there goes another rubber tree plant!"*

Family relations are fraught with expectations. How many of us were brought up, burdened by the high expectations of our parents! Having missed out on Higher education themselves, many parents of my generation were determined that their children would not miss out, as they had. On one level, this is highly commendable, but the danger is, that they may begin to live through their children's achievements or failures, as the case may be.

Most of us expect that our close relatives will be loving, kind, and helpful. In our turn, we expect that our children will be hard-working and take advantage of the opportunities we try to give them; even be grateful for the sacrifices we make to give them those opportunities.

It is easy, even natural, to feel disappointed when those high expectations are not realised. But on the other hand: It is said that *“Behind every successful man stands an amazed mother-in-law.”*

PATRICIA NEAL: wrote

‘A master can tell you what he expects of you. A teacher, though, awakens your own expectations.’

In my early career as a design lecturer in Further Education, I learned the important part ‘expectation’ played in the teaching / learning experience. I was assigned to a part-time class which was a part of a European Initiative to widen access. The students were a hotch-potch of characters, many of whom had failed to complete other courses or who had never had an opportunity to benefit from further education. I arrived on the first day to be met with a class of big, tough looking, black-leather clad males, with pierced body parts and aggressive hair styles and shaved heads. I don’t mind telling you...I was daunted....in fact I was terrified! I went to the ladies loo and gave myself a talking to in the mirror - “You are the teacher....you can’t run away!” (because that is exactly what I felt like doing!) Well, I forced myself to go back and we staggered forward together, through the course on poster design. I was so wet behind the ears, so inexperienced, my expectations of their abilities were far too high.

At one point, one brave soul said, “Lyanne, we don’t have a clue what you are talking about!” So I thanked him, amended my language, explained things more clearly.....and at the end of the day they surprised me on two levels. They became hard working, committed students and they achieved a high standard of work....also their outward appearance in no way reflected their true character - they were gentle giants, one of the nicest classes I ever had!

My *negative* expectations about them as students (based on first impressions) were proved wrong....my *positive* expectations (although based on inexperience), that they could achieve a decent standard of work, were proved correct. At the end of the course I confessed how scary I had found them on that first day, and they were appalled. My lack of experience, and naively high expectations, had almost accidentally, lifted them to a level which amazed my Head of Dept! One of the boys (expand?) continued on, right through the system, ending up with a degree in graphic design and a successful design career. I met him years later, and he told me that I was the first teacher in his life, who believed in him and expected him to succeed. That kind of feedback in teaching is as rare as gold-dust!

But it must be said that great expectations can cause more harm than good.

They are a mixed blessing .

Expectations can be a big stumbling block for us, both personally and communally. There is an old story about a man who hunted rabbits. One day when he was out in the woods, a rabbit ran past him and collided with a tree stump, knocking itself unconscious. The man couldn't believe his good fortune as he put the rabbit in his game bag. Every day for the rest of his life, he came back and watched the stump, waiting for this to happen again.

I think of myself currently, as a 'recovering expecter.' I've had trouble with expectations in my friendships and relationships. My expectations to match the intimacy, quality, and intensity of meaningful *childhood* friendships have got in the way of some *adult* friendships. I've had to learn to approach each friend with an open heart and not burden the relationship with my previous experience. I have latched on to gurus and guides, with great expectations, only to find that each one turned out to be just as human and as fallible as myself. Unrealistic expectations inevitably cause feelings of disappointment, anger, and resentment. We need to recognise that we are not in charge, and we cannot control what others do. I also need to learn to keep my expectations of *myself* within a realistic balance.

And then there is the **ultimate expectation**:

What do you expect after the end of your life?

History is full of religious leaders who have built a following based on the promise of life everlasting. Unitarians tend to believe that such an expectation is a poor substitute for a life lived well in the here and now. It has often been said that Unitarians believe in **Life Before Death**.

It is possible to have *opposing* expectations about the outcome of an event. We can expect the worst and hope for the best. Those who plan ahead must plan appropriately for more than one outcome. Mixed expectations.

Gandhi said - '*Live as if you will die tomorrow but learn as if you will live forever.*'

Expectations play a role in communities as well as in individuals. Great expectations play a role in this fellowship. We are in the process of establishing a long-term plan for the refurbishment of this building. We are making plans for SATURDAY SESSIONS, extending our activities. We are planning our celebrations of 200 years of Unitarianism here in Glasgow. We hope and expect that these plans will result in this church better serving this congregation and the wider community.

All the prophets and great teachers of every faith, had great expectations of their followers. We are soon going to be discussing and sharing our Unitarian ideas about Jesus, as a

man of his times, as a healer, and his place in history and the natural world. However we may assimilate and understand the legacy of the new Testament, there is no doubt that the teachings of Jesus were high in expectation of how we should aspire to be as human beings - to love our enemies, to forgive those who wrong us, to share our wealth with the poor, to go the extra mile - these are huge challenges!

Expectation has roots in *hope* and in the power of *faith*. Unitarians have faith in the potential of people to grow and learn and heal. We have faith in the power of the human spirit. Not all the time, of course, because we are *human* and our expectations must be tempered with acceptance and love. We must learn to hold them within realistic boundaries. However, returning to the teaching / learning model, there was an experiment with children back in 1964. The six-year-olds who the teachers expected to do well, did more than twice as well as the six-year-olds the teachers thought were 'average'. Faith in people can make a difference in their lives. When I doubt this, I remember the people who, in the face of serious illness, have extended the length of their lives and made remarkable recoveries.

So, we have faith in the power of the human spirit. We expect that every person can grow and change. It is part of Unitarian Universalist belief in the potential goodness of every person.

Like my granny, I am a big fan of quotations too! Perhaps she could have taught Mickey the budgie some of these :-

Sydney J Harris, a 20th century columnist wrote:-

An idealist believes the short run doesn't count. A cynic believes the long run doesn't matter. A realist believes that what is done or left undone in the short run determines the long run.

Goethe said: *"Love is an ideal thing, marriage a real thing; a confusion of the real with the ideal never goes unpunished."*

Alexander Pope said *"Blessed is the man who expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed" - (that was his ninth beatitude.)*

Alice Walker said: *"Expect nothing. Live frugally on surprise."*

One of **Aristotle's** best lines goes: *"Happiness is the successful exercise of vital powers, along lines of excellence, in a life that gives them scope."*

Expectation it would seem is a double edged sword. I wonder where you stand on this subject?

I believe that a state of well-being consists of positive outcomes that exceed our expectations.

I cling to the belief that our expectations are our *windows on the future*. We need to keep them trimmed and reasonably achievable. We need to learn *acceptance* and to forgive ourselves and others when we fall short.

But to be without expectations is to be without life.

Perhaps you have heard of the 'OK Chorale' which is one of the core elements in the philosophy of Eric Berne, Founder of Transactional Analysis Psychology. Visualise a square, divided into 4 smaller squares....

(top left) **I'm OK - You're OK** (which translates to 'I respect and value myself and I respect and value you'. A healthy position to be in!

(top right) **I'm OK - you're not OK** ('I respect and value myself but on some level, I don't respect and value you') Not so healthy.

(bottom left) **You're OK - I'm not OK** ('I respect and value you, but I don't respect and value myself. Also not so healthy.

(bottom right) **You're Not OK - I'm not OK** (I don't respect and value myself, and I don't respect and value you. This is the most hopeless position - and potentially, the most damaging)

I'll end this service theme with a small edit to the top left square, (with apologies to Eric Berne)...this is the area I aspire to be in as much as possible..... "I'm OK ***just as I am*** - You're OK ***just as you are***

Finally, I began with a mention of my choir. When we perform at concerts, I know that the people who enjoy our performance the best - is us - the choir! We have sung and practised together for weeks and weeks, we know the songs and harmonies inside out.

I can't speak for the other Worship Leaders here in GUC, but I am pretty confident that the person who gains most from my services.....is the person who offers them up! They are drawn from my own experiences and probably reflect what I most need to address in my own life.

So thank you for listening and for giving me this opportunity to share my thoughts and ideas.
