

Nine readings for Easter Monday, with music

By Robin Ford, March 2012

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Fragment 1 Prologue

From the *Sailing Directions, New South Wales Coast*, section on *Coastwise Navigation, Winds and Weather*.

In summer (October to March) the barometer falls over the whole continent, the north-western low pressure increases in area and the high pressure is limited to the coast of New South Wales. Hence...the winds north of Sydney are north-easterly, becoming north-west in Torres Strait.

In settled summer weather, from October to April, tolerably regular land and sea breezes prevail, sometimes for weeks together; the north-east wind sets in early in the forenoon and subsides towards midnight, and the light land breeze blows from about midnight to 8 a.m.

Music 1 Summer-time, Gershwin

Fragment 2 Summer's fading

You could choose something from *The Summer of the 17th doll* – a play by Ray Lawler (not reproduced, here for copyright reasons).

The sugar cane harvest is over. For the seventeenth time, two cane-cutters join their women friends. The summer ends; their relationships collapse too.

Music 2

Fragment 3 Marking the change of season

How to mark the change from summer to winter?

Have a holiday of course!

A four-day weekend would be about right. Say, Friday to Monday.

When? Not before the equinox, and not too much later than half way through conventional autumn – which would be about 15 April. At any rate, not after ANZAC day.

So, the Friday of our holiday can't be before 20 March and the Monday can't be much later than 25 April. We've arrived at the span of the variable Easter holiday (Friday 20 March to Monday 26 April).

What could we do during the holiday to mark the change of season? We might have a last camping trip before the weather turns colder, watch the new season AFL at "The G", or go to the National Folk Festival in Canberra. If we have a religious faith it will be around the time for observances of Passover, or Easter.

Some time on the holiday Monday we could reflect upon the change of season, and consider the passing of summer, the contributions people make for no reward, the mystery of life, the wonder of the earth's bounty, and the pleasures of winter to come.

We can tell stories.

Music 3 My song is love unknown

Fragment 4 The Christian story of Easter

After forty days of introspection in the desert, Jesus is spiritually ready to teach his radical ethics. Living out his vision, he travels the country as an itinerant preacher and gathers disciples along the way.

All goes well until he confronts the centre of power.

When he enters Jerusalem the crowd cheers, but we know it is fickle. Jesus surely knows that his unflinching commitment to an unorthodox ethical code will bring conflict with religious authorities. They will want to eliminate him.

At a Passover meal with his disciples the mood darkens. Jesus hints at world-changing agony to come. And someone will betray him. It is their “last supper”.

Jesus and his disciples take a night walk to high drama. In the garden of Gethsemane a kiss from the betrayer singles out Jesus to a band of vigilantes who deliver him to the religious leaders. After a concocted trial the priests transfer Jesus to the jurisdiction of the occupying Roman authorities. With some reluctance, the governor adds him to the list of those to be nailed to a cross – an excruciating death that Rome prescribes for the worst of criminals.

There is a last chance. The Roman governor will pardon one of the convicted men. He lets the crowd choose. Surely they will want the harmless itinerant teacher. “Who is it to be?” “We want Barabbas.” “And Jesus?” “Nail him to the cross!”

Jesus dies on the cross.

But the story doesn’t end there. Shortly after his death the tomb in which his body was placed is found to be empty. Jesus miraculously appears to his disciples and accompanies them for a while, before disappearing from view.

Empowered by a spiritual experience, his disciples go out to spread the good news that Jesus taught, with the cross as a symbol of their commitment.

Music 4 Small town

Fragment 5 The Australian story of ANZAC

By one account 8 709 Australian ANZACs died at Gallipoli, out of an Allied total of 50 133. The total for the defending Turks was given as 86 692.

All volunteers, the ANZACs were landed in the wrong place. The preparatory gun barrage was not properly scheduled. The defending Turks held the high ground and had time to prepare.

The Allies achieved nothing.

It all happened just 14 years and 114 days after Federation.

Australians are still drawn to Gallipoli. Are they as affected by the gravestones as British author Geoffrey Moorhouse, who writes:

....Here is the grave of Trooper E. W. Lowndes, of the 3rd Australian Light Horse, who was thirty when he was killed on May 23. "Well Done Ted"" it says on his stone. Here is Private W. Turton, 9th Battalion Australian Light Infantry, twenty-four years old, died on May 20: "The Best Of Lads None Better May He Rest In Peace. Here is Private J. J. Carroll, 6th Battalion Australian Infantry, died on August 7 when he was twenty-five: "My Jim Gave His Life For Freedom. Loved And Remembered By His Dad."

Everywhere you look in the Australian cemeteries are the marks made by broken-hearted people reaching out from ten thousand miles away.

Many will attend ANZAC day dawn services throughout Australia to remember sacrifices that have been made in war. Sacrifices demanded by human failure.

Music 5 And the band played waltzing matilda

Fragment 6 On the edge

Where was I before I was born?

What will become of me when I die?

How should I live my life?

"Love your neighbour and live as affirmatively as you can until you drop." Don Cupitt

Music 6 A song of Autumn, by Adam Lindsay-Gordon (read)

Adam Lindsay Gordon was in South Australia and unwell when he wrote this in response to a question from five-year-old Maude Power.

A SONG OF AUTUMN^[2]

' Where shall we go for our garlands glad
At the falling of the year,
When the burnt-up banks are yellow and sad,
When the boughs are yellow and sere ?
Where are the old ones that once we had,
And where are the new ones near ?
What shall we do for our garlands glad
At the falling of the year ? '

' Child ! can I tell where the garlands go ?
Can I say where the lost leaves veer
On the brown-burnt banks, when the wild winds blow,
When they drift through the dead-wood drear ?
Girl ! When the garlands of next year glow,
You may gather again, my dear—
But I go where the last year's lost leaves go
At the falling of the year.'

Fragment 7 Earth's bounty

The District Exhibits at The Sydney Royal Easter Show shout out “Harvest!”. They are testaments to our remarkable agricultural technologies, but in the end what sustains us is the mystery that lies behind all growing things.

As we walk alongside the exhibits we buy an apple, perhaps from the farmer who grew it. Or we buy a photograph of this year's tableau – a story told in produce; the familiar pumpkins and wool, and the less familiar items that we city-folk ask the country folk to name for us. But there's no mistaking the jars of honey and the bottled vegetables that ring the display, seeking a precision that nature didn't aspire to. And there are eggs.

For our northern hemisphere cousins and their spring-time celebration of Easter, eggs symbolise new life. They have hard-boiled eggs for decorating, rolling, or egg dumping. There are eggs to be hunted in the garden, and of course there are chocolate eggs.

We have chocolate eggs too. In fact we have chocolate everything at Easter: chocolate bunnies, chocolate bilbies, chocolate in show bags. For us, eggs and chocolate are symbols of earth's bounty.

But even when reproduced in chocolate, bunnies are a worry. With a spring-time Easter they symbolise reproduction and new life, but for us? Well, bunnies represent human folly. To point out this moral, enter the chocolate facsimile of the endangered, rabbit-eared, marsupial, bilby, chosen to remind us of the balance of creation and just how difficult it is to put the ecological egg back together again once it has been broken.

Earth's bounty brings with it a responsibility.

Music 7 We plough the fields and scatter

Fragment 8 Settling in for winter

You might be someone who prefers winter. To paraphrase the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayam

A well insulated house, a reverse-cycle heating system, and thou.

Perhaps you like to go to plays or concerts, or the football code of your choice, or read. It's the time for bushwalking, and skiing if you are lucky with the season.

Music 8

Fragment 9 Epilogue

From *Sailing Directions, New South Wales Coast, Coastwise Navigation, Winds and Weather.*

In winter (April to September) pressure rises over the whole continent, and is highest along a belt from Port Macquarie to Perth (West Australia).

During the winter months – April to October – there are frequent strong westerly winds, with fine clear weather. At this season gales blow between north-east and south, with rain, and there is no settled weather with on-shore winds. North and north-east winds are usually light, and accompanied by rain.

When the westerly winds of winter blow strongly, they are rarely interrupted by easterly gales, but when pressure becomes high in the south, the westerly winds will give place to easterlies.

In June, July and August, the easterly gales are most violent, with usually a high barometer, very heavy rain, and sometimes thunder, lightening and hail, and are generally preceded by a heavy sea rolling in upon a dead lee shore. They usually blow strongest between north-east and east-south-east, shifting in squalls between these points. Sometimes the squall blows itself out to seaward, but the sea comes home to the coast. There is nothing to prevent a well-found ship maintaining an offing, by watching the shifts of wind, and keeping on the starboard tack as long as prudent, thus bringing the prevailing southerly current on the lee bow.

Music 9