March Madness

It’s one of the biggest sporting events in the United States: the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) men’s basketball tournament. Running from mid March to early April, the competition—popularly known as “March Madness”—captures the attention of millions of fans across the globe.

Here in the South Pacific, the Adventist Church is holding its own version of “March Madness”, with a number of exciting events taking place over the next few weeks.

• **Queenstown Classic (March 9-11)**
The first 25,000 Spins event for New Zealand will raise money for families in the Tay Ninh Province of Vietnam—one of the poorest regions in Asia.

• **Candlelight vigils for Syria (March 15)**
ADRA Australia is encouraging Adventist groups across the country to join or hold candlelight vigils to commemorate the third anniversary of the beginning of the Syrian civil war.

• **Premiere screenings of *Hell and Mr Fudge* (March 15-22)**
A little story about a big lie. Click the link for screening times and locations.

• **Manifest Creative Arts Festival (March 20-23)**
Highlights of the event include the *Breathe* fine art exhibition, a theatre production of *Chariot: the Eric Liddell story*, and the return of contemporary Christian music pioneer Robert Wolfgramm to the stage.
Are you hosting an event in March (or April, May, June . . .) that we don't know about? Well, we'd love to hear from you. Get in touch at news@record.net.au.

**WATCH: Controversy over Pope's call for unity**

A video from Pope Francis calling for Christian unity, played at a gathering of Pentecostal leaders in the United States, has provoked considerable comment, but not as much as the video’s introduction.

**District director dies in Vanuatu**

Vanuatu Mission is mourning the loss of an Adventist pastor and district director on the island of Malekula.

**Read Adventist World**

"You can't know where you’re going until you know where you've been." *Adventist World* looks back at the places and people who played key roles in forming the Adventist movement.

**Watch/download InFocus**

Some parents guide their children into specific gender roles; others do everything to break traditional stereotypes. What's the right balance? Family life educator Trafford Fischer offers some timely
Amazing Grace: Lani’s story continues

“I have to forgive him,” Lani Brereton says of the drunk driver responsible for the horrific accident that nearly claimed her life.

One weekend

James Standish recalls the time he crashed the brand new company car on his first weekend on the job.

*This week’s offering (March 8, 2014): Adventist World Radio insights.

Lyle Shelton from the Australian Christian Lobby says it’s a fine balance between racial hate speech and free speech.

After experiencing childhood abuse, Esther Caukill-Talin was trafficked into Japan by a criminal gang who put her to work as a prostitute. Do the scars ever heal?
The great tragedy of this century

“Syria has become the great tragedy of this century—a disgraceful humanitarian calamity with suffering and displacement unparalleled in recent history. The only solace is the humanity shown by the neighbouring countries in welcoming and saving the lives of so many refugees.”

—Antonio Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees

Yalda stretched to pass me a cup of steaming tea. She smiled. Her generosity was an act of traditional Arabic generosity, but not at all reflective of the gravity of her personal situation.

As I sat on the cold ground amongst her young Syrian family I was humbled and shocked by her story. She told me of the life-risking trek they had made across the Lebanese border from their home of Syria. She told me how loved ones, homes and futures had been destroyed. She told me about the suffering they continued to face.

Although grateful for the safety and support found in the informal settlement camp, they could hardly be described as happy. Staring through me, she stated matter-of-factly the daily consideration she gives to returning to their home, even as airstrikes and terror continue.

Yalda’s children have not attended school for close to two years. The knowledge that her children’s futures will be deeply impacted by these interruptions to their schooling has forced Yalda to face what Husain, another Syrian refugee I met, called "the two bad choices": the decision between returning to danger to give his children the chance of an education or to stay in safety and watch them lose out. It's a decision no parent should have to make.

Globally, governments have contributed less than 45 per cent of the United Nations’ $US6.5billion appeal to fund their response. And, with the interests of media outlets quickly and consistently diverted, the Australian public has failed to grasp the desperate reality of the situation in Syria and surrounding countries.

In short, the assistance needed will not be able to be delivered unless more is done.

I hate to sound like a bleeding heart, but my visit to Lebanon made it real. The longer we wait, the deeper hunger grows, the higher the death toll climbs and the longer Syrian children remain out of school.

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) is one of just a handful of agencies granted access to deliver humanitarian assistance inside Syrian borders, and is working across Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq to support those forced to flee.

Next Saturday (March 15) marks the third anniversary of the beginning of Syrian civil war and we are joining with other Australian agencies to ensure this is the last anniversary marked with bloodshed.
As part of next weekend’s campaign I will be lighting a candle for Syria. I will be lighting a candle for Yalda and her children. I will be lighting a candle as a symbol of the hope I want to bring to their situation. I hope you can join me.

To mark the three year anniversary and publicly call for more to be done in Syria and surrounding countries, ADRA is encouraging Adventist groups across the country to join or hold candlelight vigils to commemorate and pray for those affected.

For more information or to support ADRA’s work in the region visit <www.adra.org.au/syriacrisisappeal>.

Beryl Hartmann is the humanitarian coordinator for ADRA Australia and recently returned from Lebanon where she worked with ADRA staff to plan ongoing projects.
What we believe matters. How we believe matters. And stories matter.

I was reminded of these truths while watching *Hell and Mr Fudge* in the company of Dr Edward Fudge, the “Mr Fudge” of the film title. He introduced the story of this part of his life by telling us he had seen the film 16 times—as well as being closely involved in the development of the film and even having a cameo role in the final movie—and has been moved to tears at a different place in the stories each time. That’s why stories matter. They move us—and “based on a true story” stories can draw us into the lived experience of another person, another family, another church.

That’s why this story told in film is so valuable. The experience of a young man and burgeoning theologian is not merely about doctrine; it’s a story of why what we believe matters to our lives and our faith.

*Nathan Brown, Dr Edward Fudge and Pat Arrabito, the film’s executive producer.*

Edward Fudge’s particular focus came after a challenge from an evangelist who offered to pay him to research what the Bible says about the traditional belief in eternal torment in hell for those who do not accept God. As the movie portrays, this was a question that had troubled him through life experience and this commission sparked a period of intense research and personal wrestling.

Set in Alabama in the 1950s-1970s—and the period has been carefully re-created, filmed in many of the locations in which the stories actually happened—the drama of the movie comes with the reactions of church members and critics to the questions he raises about aspects of faith and some of the conclusions his research leads him toward. Ultimately, Dr Fudge’s research was published in the 500-page *The Fire that Consumes* in 1982.

Described as “theology lite”, *Hell and Mr Fudge* might be better labelled a theological drama, perhaps an under-appreciated and under-populated genre in the history of cinema. It is first—and had to be when presented in this format—a human drama. As such, the film works to raise questions more than drawing out answers. But the best discussions start with questions, not answers. This is the strength of this story and the way it has been told.
Adventist churches have used the film across North America as an evangelistic opportunity, a low-confrontation invitation to share a story and glimpse questions outside much of Christian tradition. For those interested in pursuing the questions for themselves but in company with the Mr Fudge they have got to know through viewing his story, a new smaller, general-readership version of Dr Fudge’s research —*Hell: The Final Word*—is being sold as a companion book.

This resonates with the central message of the film. By its story, *Hell and Mr Fudge* urges that we should not be afraid of new ideas, we should be prepared to learn and be led into a greater understanding of the Bible and what it teaches, and to stand up for what is truth even in the face of tradition, opposition and criticism. This is often not an easy journey—as evidenced by the tears re-visiting the story brings to Dr Fudge even today. Following truth brings its joys and its sorrows—but we have to trust that it also brings hope, whatever our circumstances or difficulties.

Such is the value of a true, well-told story of someone who did.

**AUSTRALIAN PREMIERE SCREENINGS:**

Melbourne: March 15, 6 pm and 8.30 pm @ Lilydale Adventist Church

Sydney: March 19, 7 pm @ Fox Valley Adventist Community Church

Cooranbong: March 20, 8.30 pm @ Ladies Chapel, Avondale College of Higher Education

Brisbane: March 22, 7 pm @ Springwood Adventist Church

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*Nathan Brown is a co-convener of Manifest Creative Arts Festival (www.artsmanifest.info) and book editor at Signs Publishing in Warburton, Vic.*
Celebrating the faithful creative

An arts festival hosted by Adventist Media Network and Avondale College of Higher Education is offering $AU5500 to those whose work best demonstrates faithful creativity.

Manifest invites entries for original creative pieces in filmmaking, instrumental music composition, photography, song composition and writing. It will give up to $1000 for the winning entries in each of six competitions.

“We seek to create a community of artists who believe churches should foster creativity and become centres for creativity and creative influence in our communities,” says co-convenor Brenton Stacey, public relations officer at Avondale.

The competitions have proved popular—Manifest received a record 86 entries this past year.

Manifest, now in its fourth year, is coordinated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the South Pacific through Adventist Media Network and Avondale. Highlights this year include the Breath fine art exhibition, the premiere of the feature film Hell and Mr Fudge, a co-production with UK-based drama troupe Searchlight Theatre Company of Chariot: the Eric Liddell story and the return of contemporary Christian music pioneer Robert Wolfgramm to stage in the concert All My Friends Are Sinners.

Competition entries close at 12 pm on Friday, March 7. Winners are announced during the Gabe Reynaud Awards in Ladies Chapel on Avondale Lake Macquarie campus on Saturday, March 22.

For more information visit <www.artsmanifest.info>.
Texas, United States

A video from Pope Francis calling for Christian unity, played at a gathering of Pentecostal leaders in the United States, has provoked considerable comment, but not as much as the video’s introduction.

Bishop Tony Palmer, who is connected with a breakaway Anglican church, is a personal friend of the Pope, and, according to Patheos, recorded the video on his iPhone.

Bishop Palmer pointed to a theological agreement between the Lutheran and Catholic churches in 1999, and asked, tongue in cheek perhaps, whether the Protestant churches had any right to exist.

The video has provoked considerable comment by other Christian leaders—some positive and others less so.

“This is a movement towards a one-world religion,” said Adventist pastor Doug Batchelor. “This is exactly what prophecy says has to happen before Jesus comes back.”
District director dies in Vanuatu

Malekula, Vanuatu

Vanuatu Mission is mourning the loss of an Adventist pastor and district director on the island of Malekula.

Pastor Warren Manasseh died suddenly from a kidney problem on January 5. Only 44, he had been a minister for 20 years and is survived by his wife and two children.

“Pastor Manasseh leaves behind a big gap for the Vanuatu Mission,” states the Mission newsletter, Talemaot. “A visionary young man with a passion for ministry, he will be a person hard to replace.”

Born at Aore Hospital in 1970, he was adopted by Pastor Manasseh and Ruth Joseph who put him through school and influenced him to take up a diploma in ministry at Sonoma Adventist College in Papua New Guinea.

His career as a minister began in 1994 in Sarakata church in Santo. He served three and-a-half years on Pentecost Island, a year at Aore as church pastor and men’s dean, three on Amabe, three on Epi, one on Maewo, three on Ambrym, two on Tongoa and three on Malekula.

“Events happened so quickly that we were left stunned for many days after,” said his wife, Linda. The couple met on Pentecost Island and married in 2002 at Aore Adventist Academy. “Our dad is dedicated to his work and very faithful in making sure we have morning and evening worships. He keeps telling us ‘hemia hemi work we God I kivim lo yumi mekem’ (This is the job God has given us to do).”

For the people of Malekula, Pastor Manasseh will be remembered for his leadership in the purchase of land for their district centre at Lakatoro and putting together a plan that will see a new office co-built by Vanuatu Mission and the South Queensland Conference in September 2014. This will make Malekula the first island to have something like this outside Port Vila and Santo, and fulfils one of the major strategic directions of the Vanuatu Mission.

“I will miss him, particularly being with the people and serving them wherever pastor went. I do not like sitting around like this. I miss ministry,” Linda said.
“I have to forgive him,” Lani Brereton says of the drunk driver responsible for the horrific accident that nearly claimed her life. Then she stops, takes a deep breath and continues, "after all . . ." She pauses again and all I can hear is sobbing on the other end of the phone, " . . . after all, I was once a drink-driver myself.” There is another long pause and then, “I’m just glad it was him who hit me, not me who hit him.”

It’s now more than two months since the catastrophic accident that left Lani in a coma, with multiple fractures to her skull and limbs, and crushed lungs. Two months since she died in the Medevac helicopter that airlifted her and her daughter from their car—smashed beyond recognition, sitting silently overturned on the road. Two months since the medics struggled to resuscitate her in flight. Two months since doctors warned her family that the swelling on her brain was so severe she would likely die in hospital or be left a vegetable. Two months since the moment that, in an instant, changed her life forever.

In that time, Lani’s story has been covered on television news, a Facebook page dedicated to her recovery has gone viral with people from across the world posting themselves making hearts with their hands to send love to Lani, and thousands of people have promised to keep Lani and her family in their prayers. “I can feel the love and I can feel all those prayers,” she says. “It’s the love and prayers that keep me going. I know it's God who brought me back. And I’m so, so thankful. My dad (John Brereton, publishing director for the Adventist Church in the South Pacific) brought [a copy of] the Record. I cried as I read the article about my accident. I just can’t believe all the love for me.”

Lani’s recovery has been far from smooth sailing. She still can’t walk due to the severe nature of the fractures and muscle loss. And she has been plagued by crushing headaches and amnesia. “After Dad asked people to pray for me, my headaches cleared up. And now I am back to 100 per cent mentally. Physically, I still have a long way to go.”

As difficult as it has been physically and mentally, it has also been a rough ride emotionally. “Before the accident I had a partner. Honestly, we weren’t living a healthy lifestyle. I knew something wasn’t right, but it was hard to know how to turn things around or move on. Two weeks ago, he left me. He has moved overseas while I’m still here bedridden in the rehabilitation hospital. I suppose when things go wrong, you find out who really loves you.”

When it comes to the subject of love, Lani can’t stop talking about her dad. “My dad has been here for me every single day. When I was suffering from amnesia, he explained what happened to me—over and over and over again—as many times as I asked. What kind of father does that?” She stops to take another big breath and again I can hear crying. Through her tears she continues, “Because of everything that has gone on in my personal life, my dad and I hadn’t been as close as both of us wanted. But this . . . this has brought us so much closer—and that will never, ever change. I want to be more like my dad—completely full of love.”

How is Lani’s 10-year-old daughter handling the tremendous shock, upheaval and stress? “She is just so strong. She gives me courage. All I want to do is to get out of rehab and back to being her mum, caring for her.
“My colleagues from Myers have been great, too,” Lani says. One visit to Lani’s Facebook page and you can see what she’s talking about. “They’ve raised money to help me through this and have been incredibly supportive. You know, I always liked work and the people I worked with. But this has made me see a whole new side of them. They have a depth of caring I never could have imagined until now.”

But what of the drunk driver whose car was on the wrong side of the road when it slammed into her vehicle? “I’ve just completed the Victim Impact Statement for the court. I’ve written that I don’t think prison is the answer. I’d rather they make him do anything but prison. Prison doesn’t make people better people. I hope they read my statement out in court because I want him to know I’ve forgiven him. What he is suffering—the guilt and regret—that is worse than any sentence they can give him. My hope is that something good comes out of this—something positive. Punishment and prison isn’t going to make anything better. Forgiveness and love will.

“I believe that even very negative things can bring about good. This accident certainly has. It has brought people together in love—my family, my colleagues, my community. And I needed to head back in the right direction. This has given me a new start. And it’s a new start I will never take for granted as it’s a start I very nearly didn’t have.”

James Standish is editor of RECORD.
At the time, the song “Don’t Worry, Be Happy” was playing everywhere. You remember that little number, don’t you?

Here’s a little song I wrote
You might want to sing it note for note
Don’t worry, be happy . . .

But I was worried. And I most certainly was not happy.

The previous week I’d started my first real job at Shell Oil, Australia. It couldn’t have come soon enough. I was sleeping on the living room floor of my brother’s share house in Erskineville, Sydney, recovering from a particularly bad case of glandular fever and I was flat broke. Not only did I start a job with what at the time seemed an immensely generous salary, but I was given an electric blue Holden Commodore company car to go with it. I dubbed it “the Blue Bullet of Destiny” and prepared to drive it through the Harbour City singing “the future’s so bright, I gotta wear shades . . .” Except it wasn’t.

The first weekend I had the Blue Bullet, I smashed it into the rear end of a car on the Pacific Highway. Examining the damage, I was full of fear and loathing. But, as it turns out, for no good reason. Come Monday, my new boss thought my debutante driving disaster a great hoot. All my colleagues were ordered out of the office to examine the damage in the parking lot, retell their various mishaps in company cars over the years and have a good laugh.

It turns out, crashing a brand new car on your first weekend on the job is quite humorous. Particularly when it’s not actually your car. And it’s not your money that’s going to fix it . . .

That weekend still stands out in my mind, however, as what it means to have a truly awful weekend.

Which is in stark contrast to last weekend.

There is something quite odd about the best times; we often don’t notice them until they’re gone. But at the end of last weekend it hit me how extraordinarily fortunate we are, and that much of that fortune is because we are part of a caring and fun-loving community with God’s love at its centre.

The weekend began when I picked up my children from our local Adventist school. The school seems rather normal to me. But talking to parents who transferred their children into the school, I’ve got a picture of just how unusually nurturing the school is. It’s a place where love rules—because God rules. And it isn’t all just soft fuzzies. It turns out when kids are loved and valued, they excel. So maybe it shouldn’t surprise anyone that the school is at the very apex of academic performance in the nation. Happy kids progressing well in spiritual, mental, physical and social spheres at a great school = the perfect place to start a great weekend.
On Sabbath morning, we went to church where our kids are treated to music, stories, crafts, quizzes and their thoughts on the deepest questions in life are listened to respectfully by adults who care for their spiritual journey. All run by volunteers who have busy lives of their own and could just as well be having a bit of a sleep in. From time to time my children participate in the church program as well. What a confidence building experience to, from a young age, stand up before hundreds of people and be listened to and appreciated.

Sabbath afternoon, friends from church popped over and our kids played happily. No appointment necessary. All seamless and comfortable.

On Sunday morning, we headed for the Weet-bix Tryathlon; another great opportunity for our kids to get into a healthy, active lifestyle. They ended the day proudly wearing their medals. But the weekend wasn’t over just yet. That afternoon, the Pathfinder club held swimming honours at the San pool, complete with vegie hotdogs and watermelon. All run by volunteers who love God and love our kids. And don’t mind getting pushed into the pool by kids having an awesome amount of fun.

No, I am not seeing last weekend through rose-coloured glasses. The truth is that Adventists have created for my children, and for anyone else who chooses to come along, a wonderful, nurturing community that provides a great variety of positive opportunities to grow in nearly every facet of life.

It’s an excellent formula for a great weekend.

Every weekend of the year.

James Standish is editor of Record.