

Drug Scene

Jonathan Aitken

Drug-Arm is a non-profit, Christian organization located within Palmerston North. The program is co-ordinated by 'Luke' (pseudonym) and was originally formed in 1989. The organization looks at how Christians, with typically high socio-economic status, can best serve another part of the community that is a world away in almost every respect. Both live within the same city, the rather well to do, and those who use or are addicted to drugs and alcohol. On Friday and Saturday evenings, Drug-Arm volunteers work by handing out food and drink and offer transport from the city centre back to homes. Also, Drug-Arm runs detoxification and support programs, as well as second-hand shops. I will describe the group, and show how this community fits into the wider community.

The organization does not, at first, appear to be based on power structures as such, though decision makers (committee and board of reference) and authority figures (Luke, for example) operate, but this is not the main focus for Drug-Arm. These people are in position to help Drug-Arm get funding, services, support and backing of local churches and governing groups (government and city council). The team can function better than other social services groups because this structure assures that the front-line volunteer is no less important than the board member, or paid staff worker. The mission statement is simple: To help people whoever they are, whatever the need, wherever they are (Personal Communication 'Luke', 20 March, 2002). This was put brilliantly by a volunteer, 'Mike', (2002): "Yes- if they weren't there, we wouldn't be there." This struck me as claiming one of the values is to find and reach out to the 'down and out' people in the wider community. This is also seen in the logo of the organization where one hand is reaching down to another. Therefore, on initial impressions, the power structure is only involved because of the direction needed to meet the needs of the people specifically affected by drugs. Whether that be the individual themselves or the community in which they live, it appears not to matter.

Initially, no clear power structure was evident.

With more observations (almost two months) it became apparent that this was wrong, the power structure is a very subtle, and mostly informal pattern of which even some of the volunteers are unconscious. For instance, in my first observations I tagged along with Luke's volunteers (of which he was not the team leader). People not usually in Luke's group had to be told that Luke was the co-ordinator, as he was clearly not the leader of the group as I had previously thought (Observations, 23 March, 2002).

As well as formal structures, an informal hierarchy locally and nationally can be noted too. Board members and Luke make major regional decisions which filter down to paid workers, then affecting the volunteers, albeit less as they are not paid and have limited decision-making roles. Most major cities in New Zealand and Australia have a Drug-Arm program operating, this makes it possible to create and share innovative ideas on problem solving.

The goals of Drug-Arm are quite simple in some ways: 'to do itself out of a job' to find the best possible way of helping those addicted to drugs such as: alcohol, marijuana, heroin in some cases, and speed. These drugs are the causes of very extensive social problems. The hierarchy and leadership are there only to make the best decisions for the direction of the Drug-Arm community in completing their goals. This requires a great deal of discussion from the volunteer upwards, so that the correct understanding between the volunteer and the board member can be gained.

Therefore the focus of power and hierarchy is somewhat different from that found in a normal business, where the sales from goods and services mostly ends up at the top of the hierarchy as individual profit. Here, the profits of goods and services end up out in the community. This occurs because of a subtle shift from a selfish to an altruistic, nature.

According to Sober and Wilson (1998) three theories of altruism include hedonism, egoism, and altruism itself. Hedonism is that the "*only ultimate desire that people have are the desires to obtain pleasure and avoid pain*" (Sober and

Wilson, 1998). The second, egoism, is that the “*only ultimate goals an individual has are self-directed*” (Sober and Wilson, 1998) for even in the event of doing something good for someone else, it is to the eventual profit of the altruist. The third theory is altruism itself, where people sometimes “*care about the welfare of others as an end in itself*” (Sober and Wilson, 1998). Using these definitions it can be seen that behaviour of Drug-Arm volunteers could truly be altruism (with no strings attached) or egoism (‘I do this to avoid the disadvantages of not doing it’) but probably not hedonism. Initially I looked at the perspective of strings being attached to the services Drug-Arm provides, the tendency for people to evangelise to the people in trouble could be seen as a non-altruistic and more egoistic behaviour (‘I will evangelise because my God tells me to and if I don’t I’m not going to be rewarded, in good ways, in heaven’). Although this egoism is not my view, it is interesting that people in the public could see it this way. This is a definite disadvantage. This in turn can affect the ability of the people in need to receive the goods and services. This probably cannot be corrected as it would interfere with the values of the organisation, and volunteers would probably quit.

Why?

Is it necessary to ask why people take drugs or alcohol? According to Nancy Mello (1981, 1982) seven possible factors add to the likelihood. These factors are: personality type, alcohol metabolism, severe life stress, psychiatric disorders, socio-cultural influences, parents and genetic factors. “*It is evident that no single biological or psychosocial variable can account for the origins of alcohol abuse and alcoholism*” (Mello, 1981, 1982). Neff and Hussaini (1982) add a new perspective on why people might take alcohol; they suggest it is a result of the stress-buffering effects of moderate alcohol consumption on life events.

In New Zealand, on the average, men drink greater amounts of alcohol than women (Casswell, 1980). In the United States between 10 and 15 million citizens have a serious problem with alcohol, while 35 million are indirectly affected by alcohol problems (Levine and Perkins, 1997). New Zealand too, has major

problems. The target clients appear to be more often male than female, young, and troubled. Helping those affected in the wider community is an important need clearly evident in the Palmerston North community.

A Journal of Discovery

I will now take the reader on a little journey of discovery. This journey takes us through the images and the conversations that I’ve seen in my observations and talks with individuals that are in or have had contact with Drug-Arm on Friday and Saturday nights.

Observation 1

All the volunteers group at the Drug-Arm building. We number about seven in all, on a cold Saturday night. It was my first observation, I was nervous about meeting new people in a new environment. I tried to explain what I was doing there, and that I was not just another new volunteer, they seemed to be very interested in my study and willing to accept me on board for the night. At the Square members of the public appeared, just milling around, either wanting to move between different pubs, or seeking food from a fast food joint, or looking for a ride home. They would normally be in groups of three or four. Males seemed to be more willing to accept food from Drug-Arm individually, females would only accept if accompanied by three or four other females or a male or two. If they had been drinking excessively, you could tell. They needed the support of others, but they would eat or accept a hot drink and be on their way, probably not remembering much. I just observed, and listened to what people were talking about. When a person walked up to a Drug-Arm van, the first conversation would be instigated easily: “What would you like? Bread? Soup? Coffee?” The volunteer seemed apprehensive about striking further conversation; it would appear small talk would suffice. This concerned me as I saw repeatedly that the volunteers failed to interact with the people on any deeper level. I had to ask why?

The next stop was the skate park where the lights were being turned off at midnight, which meant that children would stop skating and either make their way home or sit on the side of the

road. The estimated ages of these children ranged from 7 to 14. There were about 15 to 20 of them. I noticed three or four older individuals sitting on a seat in the skate park in the dark, and that made me wonder, why? This entire place seems foreign to me. Why spend all night at a skate park and why sit in the cold dark? Conversation was very hard for the volunteers, except one, a strong Maori volunteer sat between the children and conversed easily. It hit me: This was their environment and their culture, none of which was logical to me but they were mostly comfortable. Most wanted Drug-Arm's Street Van to take them home (mostly to Highbury), and this took time.

A car unexpectedly turned up and a youth hopped out and started threatening a younger kid for something he'd borrowed. The role of Drug-Arm changed from an intermediate between the mainstream people and the marginalized, to a diffusing medium of the tension that was building. Everyone became quiet and no one wanted to get involved, but all attention was focused on the outcome of this altercation. It was my belief that if Drug-Arm were not there, fists would have flown. It became clear that the volunteers, while not directly involved, definitely affected the outcome (something that no one from the Palmerston North mainstream would have heard or known about).

I then rode in the Street Van (a van that takes vulnerable people off the street) as they went around the blocks near the pubs looking for isolated or vulnerable individuals; they cruised off to the university and back, looking for people walking home. One woman walking down a dark street hadn't been drinking but she was obviously vulnerable. She told us the story of her night and why she was walking alone. I felt incredibly sorry for her and realised why Drug-Arm felt this transport facility was important, I knew that this woman could have ended her evening in a disaster. 'Luke' shared a story of an instance when a girl was left behind by Drug-Arm because the van was full. She was later attacked and raped. "I'll never forget that" ('Luke', 23 March, 2002) I remember him saying. Again I asked myself, why does this happen? (Observations, 20 April, 2002)

Comments on observation 1: I can only come up with one answer to the many questions raised in this observation. Culture plays an important

role in most interactions in life; the meanings of things for one person can mean something totally different for another. A historic example of this is the different meaning of land ownership between Maori and Pakeha. Maori believed and believe today that no individual has total ownership of land; the tribe uses it as a sacred relationship. Pakeha thought of land as a commodity that could be sold and divided as the owner wanted. Culture also plays an important role in communication, and that became apparent to me here. The volunteers have to know something about the people and their culture, the location that they are in effect, invading. It became apparent when further conversation is not extended that people feel self-conscious. It appears difficult for a typical European, of good standing in society, to associate with those who are on the surface, crude, poorly educated, and poor. When they are drunk or under the influence of drugs, communication and relationship is even more difficult.

Observation 2

This was a Friday night, still cold. I wasn't welcomed, as I had been the first time. I just assumed this was because I wasn't under the authority of 'Luke', but I appreciated the chance again to head out on the streets. I helped butter bread and began to take on some of the roles of a Drug-Arm volunteer. I decided not to focus on what the volunteers would do, rather I began gathering information about the environment to which I hoped I was now more accustomed. I decided I would ask the people on the street to see what they thought of Drug-Arm. I realised that some would be intoxicated, others would be 'high', and others would have the capacity to lie. Therefore, I decided to find the overall picture of what the people on the street think, and avoided taking specific instances. It was not a busy night, but I managed to talk to four males: one a young farmer cruising (boy racing) around town. Another was an old Maori, who had finished the last round at a local pub and was looking for a ride home. Another was a guy I used to work with, he and his mate were heavily intoxicated, and so we tended to laugh and joke more than anything. Also I talked to a group of four males looking for a good time on the town (they were looking for females). They were

slightly disappointed with Palmerston North's night life. Not one of these individuals could say something negative about Drug-Arm. They all commented on the great food and the offer of a ride home as a good thing. Some asked why the volunteers did this and I would pass the question over to one of the volunteers to answer. However, I found myself getting involved in talking to these individuals, asking them about what they do and how they are going in life. I found myself also sharing with them about myself in most cases. The communication that was so hard to start with suddenly became easy, I realised that a trust bond had formed, a new relationship was forming where I didn't care that they were drunk, and they didn't care that I was Christian. Sharing took place, and I began to understand the ethos behind the volunteers. This work was very important to them, the conversation wasn't forced, but when it did happen a causal respect formed. It didn't need to happen all the time.

Comments on Observation 2

I realised afterwards that I did not consult with or find out about a feminine view of Drug Arm. I think that the situations at the time, and the uncomfortable feeling I felt, prevented me from talking to any women. The viewpoints that I did get I can only summarise in words as: Trust, safe, reliability, non-confrontational, inviting, and religious. I realised that I comforted some people with the conversations that took place; I took an interest in them, and made them feel important to me. While I could not perform all the roles of the Drug-Arm volunteers, like evangelise, as that was not my place, I was in fact empowering the people I met with encouragement. Whether this affects them in the morning is another issue.

A Further Look at Values, Organization and Services

Drug-Arm is a Christian organization with affiliations with 32 different churches in the Manawatu, as well as other drug rehabilitation organizations, and has a strong Christian foundation, which gives rise to a supportive atmosphere. The program is much like that provided by other religious programs in their approach to helping

others. Rapport is created between the volunteers and the people they serve, stemming from the free services provided, the trust that is built, and the reliability that they will always be there (Personal communication: 'Mike', 17 March, 2002).

The values professed by those of the Christian faith enable respectively high status persons to do something for supposed lower socio-economic status people. I looked at the bible, and at Jesus, for understanding. This is not a religious exercise but rather a way to understand the foundations of wanting to help others from a Christian perspective. In Luke 10: 27-37, Jesus talked to a man about how to gain eternal life, and one of the answers that came up is "*love your neighbour as yourself*," so the man asked "*who is my neighbour*" (Bible, NIV, 1991) so Jesus told a long winded story of a man travelling a road to Jericho who was beaten and robbed. As the man lay dying a priest and a Levite (a man from a special Jewish tribe) came down the same road, when they saw the man they passed on the other side. Then a Samaritan passed and he saw the man and took pity on him, gave medical care, let him ride on his donkey and put him up in an inn to recover. Then Jesus asked, "*which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man?*" This rhetorical question reveals much. The Jewish priest and Levite, who are supposed to be righteous and on the same side as the beaten Jew, did not want to associate with a dying man. This can be related to this situation in Palmerston North as those who ignore that there is any problem with drugs or alcohol, or those who think that it is someone else's problem. Whether because of status or religion that we don't want to get involved, Jesus pointed out the hypocrisy that we all have, by sending the "lowest person imaginable" to help the beaten man. This is probably one of the reasons that Christians form organizations to help those that they normally would not associate with, because of this passage in the Bible. The moral of the story is to care for those outside of your own community, do not over look them, and be a neighbour to everyone.

'Luke' (personal communication, 20 March, 2002) talked about doctors and psychologists giving free care and services, as well as counsellors, the unemployed, nurses, and even bread companies giving bread all working together to

serve the people on Friday and Saturday nights. All up around 1000 members are currently involved in giving some services for free. This is a wide cross section of individuals who add to the growth of Drug-Arm and the support it gives. When asked, 'Luke' (personal communication 20 March 2002), as well as the volunteers I talked to, said that they do this because of a "servant heart", or a "desire to help others." I take this to mean that they do not like to see others going through bad times, or become intoxicated. By dealing with the causes of these situations and by engaging people in their environment (the Palmerston North Square at the centre of town) they help lift people out of negative situations (Observations, 23 March, 02).

Of the people that Drug-Arm helps on Friday and Saturday nights, 60 percent come from Highbury ('Luke', 20 March, 2002), a typically low socio-economic area of Palmerston North. This means that the targeted individuals within the city are being reached, the other 40 percent is made up of homeless, drunken teenagers and street kids (as young as 12 years old), and occasionally others who just want company, food or a taxi service ('Mike', 17 March 2002).

Drug-Arm, Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.), public health and mental health services, and police, are all competing, in a way, for the same clientele of drug abusers. Each program provides different services. Together, they provide a comprehensive support for clients. The police and public health sector try to lock the offenders up, especially for illegal drug use and immediate detoxification, respectively. This action does not provide a solution for the continuing problem of addictions and the life circumstances that are causing the problems in the first place. This gap is slightly closed in the mental health sector, but alcoholics go mostly unnoticed, as they may not see that they have a problem. Alcoholics Anonymous tries to close this gap with support for individuals in a support group atmosphere, but the individuals have to come to A.A. to solve their problems, and A.A. offers little support for family and others affected by an individual's addiction. This is one of Drug-Arm's domains, for as well as providing help for individuals, they get to know the families if possible. They try to help families support individuals, through practical means (e.g., second-hand shops) as well as by spiritual means. This provides a more

holistic approach to supporting people who are addicted to drugs. This is one strength, another is Drug-Arm's ability to go into the environment of the drug abusers (the Square) and provide direct services and encouragement (observations, 23 March, 2002) for the people (in fact, the Palmerston North City Council won't provide funding unless they do this).

Another strength is a religious commitment to help others. It was quickly very clear to me that this was not only a support group, but also an evangelistic group. Members will always mention that they are Christians and follow the example of Jesus. The volunteers appear to be very open and accepting of drug addicts and their problems, but this can be a weakness, people who are looking for help usually don't want strings attached with that help, and the evangelistic approach, can be seen as a string (I'll help, if you accept what I believe). A question that Drug-Arm volunteers are usually asked is 'why are you doing this', and the normal answer is 'because I believe in Jesus, and this is what he told us to do' (Observations, 23 March, 2002). A certain amount of acceptance is needed on both sides for help to be accomplished. Thus, a continuum of help models can be found in Palmerston North: from the police 'I will help you if you like it or not' to the Drug-Arm approach 'if you want help here it is'. Another weakness of Drug-Arm is that it is trying to do everything within the city, without appropriate or sufficient funding. This means that it is widely stretched and always looking for funding.

Drug-Arm as a group within a wider community, has links with other communities, for instance, the Palmerston North City Council and the government provides some funding and regulations for Drug-Arm, the local police refer clients to Drug-Arm for rehabilitation, and Drug-Arm refers clients to support groups. The relationships are shown in the following diagram:

The Palmerston North City Council has power over the community. Recently (2nd observation, 11 May, 2002) I was told about a curfew placed for under 17 year olds after 10:00 pm. An obvious advantage of this is that children are off the streets, which helps Drug-Arm manage those in the Square more efficiently. However, there are covert effects of this: for example, what happens to the children while they are at home? Perhaps

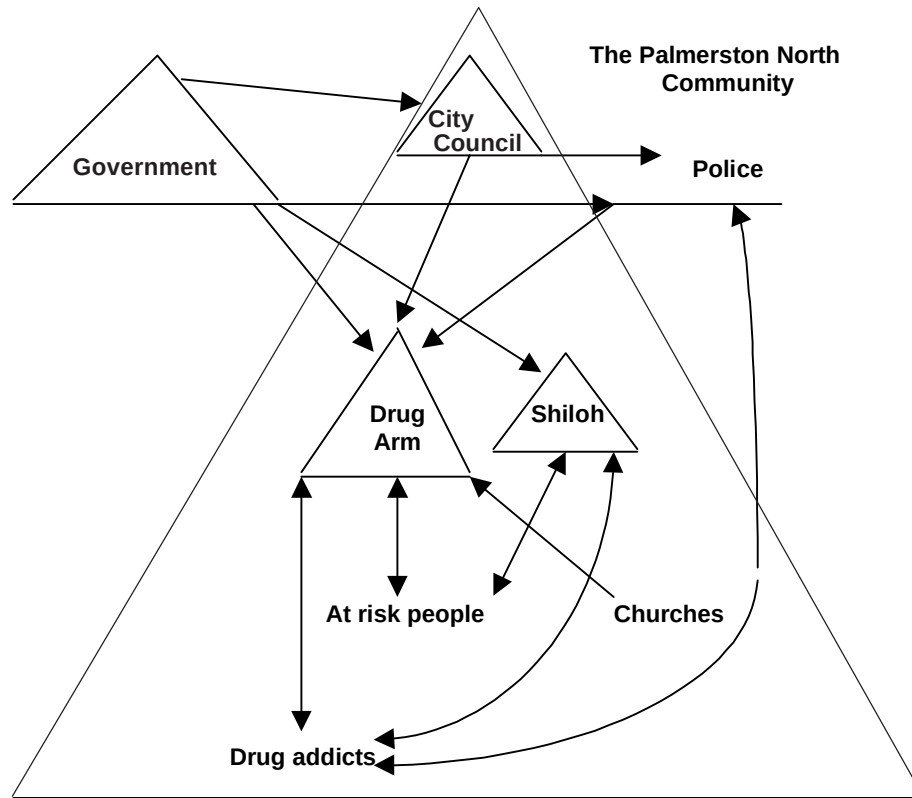


Fig. 1. Diagram showing the community links to and from Drug-Arm to other organizations.

a better question to ask is why do children end up in the streets? And would neglect or abuse be a reason why the children are in the streets? No one would confirm this speculation. If children are in the streets, it could be because they don't want to be at home, right where the City Council, ill-informed as they may be, are sending them, and also right out of reach of Drug-Arm. This is both helping and hindering the goals of Drug-Arm.

There is a clear cultural difference in the two groups affected by Drug-Arm and therefore it is hard to find a link between these two almost entirely different subsets in society: the 'marginalized' and the 'upper class'. By marginalized I mean those that are disadvantaged by lack of money, joblessness, lack of education, as well as other more minor factors like skin colour, clothing styles, language style, and so on. Disadvantaged in some way, these people

are therefore all too frequently looked down on by the 'upper class'. By the 'upper class' I mean those that have education, or a position of power.

'The marginalized within society appears to be the main problem', 'There have always been the marginalized', 'why should I help those that refuse to help themselves.' People in the upper socio-economic class of Palmerston North can always say these things, and I was one of them. I now tend to think that it is the distance between the high class, and the marginalized, which is the cause of the friction and discrimination. This is reflected when reading the article of Trickett, Watts, and Birman (1993) and the diversity issues that are apparent: *"a commitment to the disenfranchised, and the role of the professional as one who gives voice to those with limited access to resources. Such efforts represent the spirit... found in the activism implications of the constructivism/contextualism"*

philosophies of science" (Trickett et al., 1993, pp. 275).

A rearrangement of society needs to take place, and "*These methods attempt to make enduring changes in the social systems themselves to the end that they are more facilitative of individual problem-management*" (Stanley, 1973, pp.185). This is a problem that Drug-Arm cannot do alone, not only do the individuals who abuse drugs have a problem but also those who choose to ignore these people at the bottom. These people at the top need to be educated, and motivated to help their peers that are in the same community as them but who happen to be just less fortunate. This is a point of intervention, as described in Cushner's and Brislin's (1997) book "*Improving Intercultural Interactions*". There is a basic training of awareness, knowledge, challenge to people's emotions, and skill development that can be used to educate the 'upper class' society. Cushner and Brislin (1997) also cited Milton Bennett (1993) when explaining a reason for the division in cultures: "*Intercultural sensitivity is not natural. It is not part of our primate past, nor has it characterized most of human history. Cross-cultural contact usually has been accompanied by blood shed, oppression, or genocide*" (Cushner and Brislin, 1997 pp.1). Biologically, it appears, we don't like, or associate with those who are different than us.

Given that theory, what can be accomplished practically? Looking at the people in the street this way, people who I have so crudely called the marginalized, are in need of empowerment, desperately. The barriers to the communications that I felt and the Drug-Arm volunteers felt must be broken down on both subsets of the community. Talking needs to take place. (It is good to see this beginning to happen; people are talking about solutions to the problematic "boy racing" epidemic in Palmerston North). Situations like the coming together to talk about issues relating to marginalization need more exposure and occurrences, where the marginalized (like boy racers) are given a voice and a clear understanding can be reached between parties without political pressures or malice.

The power structures of this community called Drug-Arm are good, efficient and not oppressive because there is no profit for the people at the top, except the reward of a good

community service. From the observations of the Drug-Arm Friday and Saturday night scenes, it is clear that Palmerston North is a split society with the gap ever widening (the rich get richer while the poor get poorer). A discussion has taken place, looking at the two crudely and typified groups isolated and positions explained. An intervention plan is needed to tackle the problems that most people are just ignoring; Education for the uneducated, and provision of power for the powerless, (which in Christian terms is very biblical). Therefore, although Drug-Arm with its present resources cannot hope to accomplish this alone, by linking with community groups and organisations, education of the 'upper class' can take place. Linking the 'upper class' and the 'marginalized' to discuss problems in non-threatening meetings can then build a stronger society together.

CONCLUSION

Drug-Arm is a program based on principles and values that may be controversial, or not widely accepted. Nevertheless, the result within Palmerston North of their caring and enthusiasm to help those affected by drug addiction and abuse is worth the price of religious expression, and evangelism. Many strengths and a few weaknesses can be found in this program, but it is noted that there is no perfect organization.

Drug-Arm is a group specialized to deal with a specific clientele, those who are in the Square, those who come to them for help, and those families affected by drug abuse. This community has extensive links to other 'competing' groups (Police, health services, Shiloh) to provide better services for the needy.

KEY WORDS Drugs. Alcohol Abuse. Sharing. Values

ABSTRACT The very heart of Palmerston North is a town square, and Friday and Saturday evenings are noteworthy for the large number of young people who congregate, drink alcohol, smoke marijuana, and engage in what are to them, pleasurable activities. Recognizing the inherent problems, a significant team of dedicated volunteers have formed, and they go forth to provide food, coffee, transport, and discussions with those in need or those potentially in need. The author studied these volunteers by joining in, and found that dialogue between these two quite different groups is possible and important. He sees great opportunity for doing good, and at the same time, raises deep questions about the causes and long-term solutions to this situation.

NOTE

Personal thanks to *Lew Findlay* and the people of *Drug-Arm* who have freely helped. I've not only felt motivated to join as a volunteer because of their welcoming hospitality and their cause, but I have become a volunteer. Thank you.

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INTERVIEWS

'Luke'	Co-ordinator	20 and 23 March, 2002
'Murray'	Volunteer	17 March, 2002
'John'	Board Member	11 May, 2002

OBSERVATIONS

Non-participant observation at the Square	23 March, 2002 11:15pm.
Participant observations, The Square, The street van, and the Railway Road Skate Park (Observation 1.)	20 April 2002 10:30pm - 3:00am.
Participant observations, The Square (Observation 2).	11 May, 2002 10:30pm - 2:00am.

Author's Address: Jonathan Aitken, 4 Goodwyn Road, Palmerston North, NEW ZEALAND
Phone: 64 6 356-9415, **E-Mail:** 00072804@uni.massey.ac.nz

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Robert J Gregory, *Guest Editor*