



Upcoming events

The first event for 2010 – and part of the 50th anniversary of the PEN Writers in Prison committee, will be:

**‘Women Writers - Double Jeopardy’
on March 14 at 3pm.**

The venue and details of the event will be announced early in 2010. Just keep an eye on the following website,
<<http://www.melbournepen.com.au>>

Renewing members- Kirsty Murray
New members- Annie Huet
Janet Howie
Deslie Bilich

Melbourne PEN Committee
President Arnold Zable | **Vice-Presidents** Judith Buckrich, Judith Rodriguez | **Treasurer** Tom Shapcott **Secretary** Jackie Mansourian | **Membership secretary** Elsa Ch’ng | **Writers in Prison Officer** Toni Jordan | **Asia and Pacific Writers Network** bernie m janssen | **Committee members** Cynthia Troup, Elaine Lewis and Helen Ian

Newsletter editor Manalini Kane

Inside

President’s report	2-7
Linz congress report	7-10
WIP report	10-11
Card writing report	11-12
Green light...	12-15
Losing the luggage	15-17
Africa still...	17-18
Anne Bihan	19
Poem 1 ‘Refugees’	19-20
Poem 2, ‘Carthage’	20-21
Poem 3, ‘Exercises’	21
The International Charter	22
Membership application	23

Remember to renew your membership for 2010. Form is at the end of this newsletter.

President's Report

Arnold Zable

Melbourne Centre of
International PEN
2009 Annual Report
Arnold Zable

To begin at the end, this afternoon I was shown around the new Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas at the State Library. The centre is still being renovated, but some of the key players have moved in. They include the directors and staff of the Melbourne Writers Festival and the Victorian Writers Centre.

Melbourne PEN is being provided with a desk, and we can begin to use it in February, next year. Finally we have a stable and central address, Melbourne International PEN, at the Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas. The facilities include meeting rooms, the boardroom, which is ideal for committee meetings, an auditorium that will seat 200, and rooms for more informal gatherings.

There will be a coffee shop at street level near the entrance, with seating both inside and on the pavement, which is due to open in March.

I met with Chrissy Sharp and Michael Williams, director and programming director of the Centre of Books, Ideas and Writing and they continue to be supportive about PEN's place in the new Centre. They are very keen to accommodate PEN.

The network, so readily available at the new centre, is already producing results. Australian writer Tara June Winch, who was mentored last year by Nobel Laureate and human rights advocate, Wole Soyinka, is setting up a program connecting women literary campaigners worldwide. She will most likely have a desk at the Centre, and will be in touch with Melbourne PEN. We will put her in touch with Judy Buckrich who is closely involved with women writers in many countries. We hope to

make the move in February or March next year when the Centre will be open to the public.

As I wrote earlier this year, in September 2006 I spent a week in Warsaw in a hotel reserved for writers. The hotel occupied the third floor of a building called, in English translation, 'The House of Literature.' I was astonished by the location. Once the home of the King's physician, the balcony of the room I stayed in overlooked a town square and faced the King's Palace in the old quarters of Warsaw. The building housed literary associations, meeting rooms, performance halls, and the well furnished offices of the Polish centre of International PEN.

In contrast, Melbourne PEN Centre has led a nomadic existence for years. We have been holding committee meetings in private homes and a variety of locations. In recent times, the Mechanics Institute in Prahran has been our

regular meeting place. Now, finally, we have a Centre that is as spacious and as centralized as the House of Literature. Our events will be published in the Centre's calendar and we will be at the hub of Melbourne's literary community.

This year has been a long and productive year. The activity began early in January, when Melbourne PEN monitored the case of Harry Nicolaides. The Melbourne-born journalist was still imprisoned in Bangkok after being arrested on August 31 last year on a charge of insulting the Thai monarchy.

The warrant alleged Nicolaides committed the offence in his novel, *Verisimilitude*, which the author self-published in Thailand in 2005 in 50 copies. Nicolaides had sent the manuscript to various Thai government agencies before publication to make sure that all was in order. He received no reply. He faced up to 15 years of imprisonment if found guilty. Nicolaides was sharing a cell

with up to 90 prisoners, including murderers, rapists and drug runners. He had witnessed violent outbursts and fighting and was in a fragile and vulnerable state.

Melbourne PEN played an important role in the Australian campaign to have him released, linking up with a range of support groups, the Nicolaides family, supporters in the Greek community, and we were ably supported by Sydney PEN and the International PEN offices in London. Pressure was applied through publicity, media contacts, and a letter writing campaign to The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Minister for Foreign affairs. Many Melbourne and Sydney PEN members took part.

Harry Nicolaides' case inspired a fundraiser at St Kilda Town Hall on February 16. The concert celebrated a cosmopolitan city in which artists from many backgrounds have worked together and

learned from each other over the years. It highlighted the role of artists in reaching across cultural borders, to express both our great diversity and common humanity. The line up included indigenous songwriter Kutcha Edwards, guitar virtuosos Slava and Leonard Grigoryan, Iraqi actor Majid Shokor, klezmer violinist Ernie Gruner, singer songwriter Joe Dolce, with readings from Garcia Lorca by actor Simon Palamaros, and readings from Wilfred Owen by actor Richard Piper. The concert was directed by pianist, arranger, and storyteller, Warren Wills and organized by musician and activist, Anthea Sidiropoulos.

Despite the considerable costs involved in staging and publicising the event, the concert raised \$1941 for Melbourne PEN. The PEN campaign contributed to Harry's release and his return to Melbourne on February 21.

The Thai government also signalled a review of 'lese majeste' the law under which Nicolaidis was charged, in response to the intense pressure applied by human rights advocates worldwide.

The mainstay of Melbourne PEN's activity continues to be our Writers in Prison work. This is the most demanding of our portfolios and Toni Jordan continues to work tirelessly to monitor cases on behalf of International PEN's Writers in Prison Committee, and to respond to rapid action alerts issued by the PEN executive in London.

As we have stressed on many occasions, barely a week goes by without news of writers being arrested threatened, harassed and even murdered. In mid July, Russian investigative journalist Natalia Estemirova was forced into a van and abducted as she left her home in Chechnya on a Wednesday morning. Her

bullet-ridden body was found in Ingushetia.

Estemirova, who was 50, had been investigating and exposing human rights abuses in Chechnya for the independent Russian human rights watchdog, Memorial. A native of Grozny, the capital of the war-torn Chechen Republic, she was a close colleague of murdered investigative journalist and writer Anna Politkovskaya, who spent much time based in Grozny, while she too documented human rights abuses in Chechnya.

In 2007 Estemirova, was awarded the inaugural Anna Politkovskaya Prize, presented each year by the nongovernmental organization RAW in WAR, (Reach All Women In War) to a female human-rights defender whose work in a conflict embodied the work of Politkovskaya.

On receiving the award, Estemirova said: "We have a lot of problems right now,

most of all with people who have found themselves in very difficult situations.

In Chechnya, there is a big problem with fabricated criminal cases and many young Chechen men are in prison in Russia under difficult conditions. Can you imagine, since 2000, the authorities have been stirring things up so anybody with power thinks they can just beat Chechens? Now there is a situation where many of them are imprisoned for nothing, for crimes that were committed by others, crimes that they had no relation to. Now these cases need to be re-examined. This is work that needs to be done by defence attorneys, and this work needs to be paid for. This is what I want to spend this prize on."

A week before Estemirova's death, Melbourne PEN hosted a dinner for the 2008 winner of the Anna Politkovskaya award, the courageous Afghanistan activist and writer, Malalai Joya. This was the highlight of Melbourne's PEN's events in

2009, and many thanks go to Jackie Mansourian for the tireless work she put into organizing it, and into making Joya feel so welcome.

Joya was in Australia to launch her autobiography 'Raising My Voice'. The book includes an account of her youth in refugee camps in Iran and Pakistan, and her teenage years in Afghanistan as a women's rights activist. She ran underground classes for girls in defiance of the ruling Taliban. After the fall of the Taliban, Joya was elected in 2003, as one of the few women to represent her province at the constitutional Grand assembly, where she dared to speak out against the crimes and corruption of the warlords in their presence. She was subsequently elected to Afghanistan's new parliament and suspended in 2007 for her outspoken views.

Those who attended the Melbourne PEN dinner were deeply moved by Joya's

fearlessness. There have been several attempts on her life, and Joya lives under constant threat. She moves about Afghanistan in disguise, from safe house to safe house, and needs constant protection. Yet she remains undeterred. Melbourne PEN will continue to stay in touch with Joya and offer support for her work.

An ongoing initiative of Melbourne PEN is the Asian and Pacific Writers Network, with committee member Berni Janssen, as its driving force. Berni monitors the network's website which attracts many writers throughout the region. She attended the International PEN Asia and Pacific Centres Regional Conference and Meeting held in Tokyo, from the 13th to 16th July. Berni also met with representatives from Tibetan PEN, Hong Kong, China, and Uyghur PEN, to discuss the Chinese Government's suppression of freedom of speech, its oppression of minority groups, and its role in ethnic cleansing.

This meeting was held just as the controversy over Uyghur activist, Rebiya Kadeer and the documentary film about her erupted in Melbourne. The Chinese government tried to have the film removed from the Melbourne Film Festival. Both Melbourne and Sydney PEN issued press releases defending the right of the film to be shown and Kadeer to be heard when she visited Australia to speak about the film.

Other events included a successful writers' salon held in the cosy surrounds of the Athenaeum library. The afternoon was well attended and ably organized by Judy Buckrich, Elaine Lewis, and Cynthia Troupe among others. A supplement of writings presented at the event was published in the September edition of the Melbourne PEN newsletter.

The Annual Melbourne PEN sponsored panel at the Melbourne Writers' Festival, held on August 22, featured author and human rights advocate Ian Baruma in conversation with Louise Adler in the BMW Edge theatre in Federation Square. Ian Baruma is a professor of human rights, democracy and new media studies at Bard College in New York, and writes on a vast range of topics, including Freedom of Speech, contemporary democracy, and the challenges of multiculturalism. For at least the eighth year in succession, the writers' festival featured an empty chair at its many panel sessions, symbolizing the plight of a missing writer.

A Melbourne PEN prepared statement was read out by chairs at the outset of each panel. This year, for the first time, the festival ran a Sunday fair in the Federation Square atrium and a stall that was run by members represented Melbourne PEN. Our final

event for the year was a panel in October at the annual Eltham World Matters weekend. Melbourne PEN sponsored a panel on human rights that included Brisbane based Indigenous writer Melissa Lukashenko.

On November 24, we celebrated our year's work with the AGM, our annual card writing session, and dinner held this year at the Fitzroy Star Hotel. It is always a moving experience to write cards to imprisoned writers with the simple message that we are thinking of them over the festive season. Meanwhile the work to advocate on their behalf and to secure their release continues on a daily basis with PEN centres worldwide responding to rapid action alerts. Toni Jordan organized the event with her typical flair and organizational skills. Jackie Mansourian once again put in many hours as Melbourne PEN secretary, and in organizing the inspiring Malalai Joya fund raising

dinner. The Newsletter continues to expand under the editorship of Lini Kane with a growing number of contributions from members. Sue Jackson in particular continues to write well researched and thought provoking articles and essays on a range of human rights issues. Tom Shapcott, our evergreen Treasurer, has kept the accounts with his usual meticulous care. Paddy O'Reilly is always on hand to administer the Melbourne PEN Website. More use should be made of this opportunity in the future. Our vice presidents, Judy Buckrich and Judith Rodriguez, attended the annual PEN conference in Austria in October, and we look forward to their reports. Elaine Lewis has been a great contributor this year, in organizing and volunteering for a number of events. Helen Ian continues to liaise with independent Chinese PEN on behalf of the committee. Elsa Ching has come on board as a membership secretary.

We wish all members a joyous New Year, and thank you all for your continued support. Next year we are planning to run a number of special events celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Writers in Prison Committee. It should make it a special year.

**World International PEN
Congress at Linz, Austria (19
– 25 October, 2009)**

By Judith Rodriguez

Linz, on the Danube in Austria, was the site of this year's PEN Congress. Like many other host cities of Congresses, it offered not just its literary heroes but also its own story for reflection. Linz is the Cultural City of Europe for 2009, and a city which cannot erase its Nazi past. Hitler's ambition to enhance and make a capital of the city where he was educated at a still-existing school is built into its civic and domestic fabric, almost invariably replacing the homes and business premises of Jewish families who were dispersed –

a word we can apply from its use by bureaucracies in Australia— as dispossessed refugees and enslaved labourers, or murdered. Linz's prosperity still rests on industry located there by Goering.

Linz used the opportunity this year to examine and discuss its Nazi history, arguably promoted by the support of its citizens, some still alive, gave the National Socialist regime. The published documentation includes a copious photographic record, fliers and scholarly books on Nazi plans and building, electronic documentary material shown at many of the sites, and – which I thought notable and responsible - a book designed for use in schools, covering the city's Nazi history.

The Linz Congress might have been crippled by the fact that the Austrian PEN Centre's executive Rosl Merdinger suffered a stroke only a couple of weeks before the arrival of the delegates. Fortunately she

is making a good recovery, and we all appreciated the spirited work of volunteers - her son Vincenz and his friends - as well as the London secretariat, for the success of the Congress.

Meetings were held at the Design Centre, a hangar-like modern conference facility, maybe a kilometre from the historic buildings at the centre of Linz. Four days of workshop discussions and the Assembly sessions were followed by a three-day course in the moveable feast of PEN's literary festival "Free the Word". This festival has been held twice in London and is now on its travels, from Linz, to Guadalajara in Mexico, to Senegal and onward. Surely it's on the cards that we might host "Free the Word" in Melbourne.

With the retirement from the position of Czech novelist Jiri Gruza, there was an election for the position of International President. Sadly, celebrated Lebanese-French novelist Amin

Maalouf had to withdraw for health reasons, leaving candidates, African-descended English woman of letters Margaret Busby, and the Canadian writer on social and economic themes John Ralston Saul, who is our new President to contest. The contested election broke new ground. Attracting three candidates of great and diverse achievements, augurs well for International PEN.

The Board saw Cecilio Balcazar of Colombia complete two terms, and she was replaced by Marketa Hejkalova, of the Czech Centre.

This year saw two Committees elect new Chairs. The Writers In Prison Committee now numbers 72 Centres and is preparing to celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2009 – 2010; some recent special activities have been a campaign against Religious Defamation, and one for Free Expression in the Americas. Its chair passed from Alison Clark of Cologne, to

Marion Botsford Fraser, a Canadian.

The Chair of the Women Writers Committee passed from our own Judith Buckrich, who has headed it since 2003 and led notable meetings in Bishkek, Helsinki and Dakar, to Kadija George of the English and African Writers Abroad Centres. A new Search Committee was elected; I continue as its Chair.

The new Albanian, Bahrainian, Mongolian, and Tunisian PEN Centres were approved by the Assembly. The Palestinian Centre was declared dormant and the long-term inactive Congo, Sudan-in-Exile and Yiddish Centres were declared closed.

Resolutions were passed concerning among other topics, abuses (many violent) of human rights in the People's Republic of China, Cuba, Eritrea, Iran, Russia, Turkey, Viet Nam, Georgia and Guinea. The German Centre sponsored

a successful resolution calling on governments to assert existing copyright laws and resist Google Inc's moves to monopolise digital copyright.

The Peace Committee is sponsoring a wide-ranging appeal to world conscience on the vulnerability of living species. Its statement expresses concern at environmental degradation, the commodification of water supplies, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and slavery. It asks for the recognition of rights of all to water and to the developed use of renewable energy, as well as to education, work, leisure activities, and peace.

The public Free the Word Festival was held mainly in German. It celebrated local writer Adalbert Stifter, and featured two visits to local cultural sites – the ancient abbey of Kremsmunster, where a poetic tribute to the optical researcher Doppler was read in a museum room in its

Astronomical Tower, and the beautiful small city of Steyr with its fine buildings from various centuries.

Personally, I capped off the Congress as cultural experience at the Landestheater's second night of Philip Glass's opera, commissioned by Linz, on the poet-astronomer Kepler – the city's most eminent citizen, *pace* Wittgenstein and Hitler.

Next year's Congress is to come to the Pacific region and will be hosted by Japan PEN Centre in the last week of September. I hope Melbourne PEN Centre will have representation there beyond its voting delegates.

Writers In Prison Report By Toni Jordan

Since the end of August, Melbourne PEN has responded to Writers in Prison alerts on 13 separate occasions on 12 individual cases, and our wonderful WIP volunteers have sent another 7 letters. We've

written emails, letters and faxes to Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan (2), Sri Lanka, Ethiopia, Niger, Yemen, Vietnam (2), Mexico (2), Iran, and China.

Sri Lanka continues to be a source of much concern to International PEN. In September we were appalled to hear of the twenty-year prison sentence handed down to Tamil journalist, Jayaprakash Sittampalam (J. S.)

Tissainayagam, under anti-terror legislation for his critical writing and publishing activities.

While in prison there have been reports that he has been tortured. He has also contracted tuberculosis and acute infected scabies while in detention. He has been denied medical treatment and has had family visits severely restricted.

Tissainayagam was convicted of the charge of 'causing communal disharmony' under the Prevention of Terrorism Act for his articles published in

2006 by the magazine North-Eastern Monthly. He was also found guilty of raising funds to publish the magazine. A confession made by Tissainayagam while in police custody and allegedly forced under torture was used as evidence to convict him.

The civil war might be over, but the war on writers in Sri Lanka is still continuing.

Melbourne PEN card-writing to writers in prison 2009

By Cynthia Troup

On the evening of Tuesday 24 November, a group of thirteen gathered at the North Fitzroy Star Hotel in St Georges Road for the Annual General Meeting of the Melbourne PEN Committee. By tradition, this event included sharing a meal together; then, at the same table, taking time to write individual messages of solidarity and friendship to writers around the world who

have been imprisoned for their writing or publishing activities.

Over seventy cards were written 'on the spot', while fifty more blank cards were taken home to complete and post later, to countries including China, Cuba, Iran and Vietnam. Each of these cards will bear the return address of the Melbourne PEN Centre, in case it proves possible for some recipients to respond.

Such card-writing events take place annually in PEN centres worldwide, just before the end-of-year holiday season. They represent a way of sharing awareness of the plight of imprisoned writers—a means of 'using the pen' to affirm its mighty potential for fostering a wider perspective on the challenge of defending freedom of expression.

Sincere thanks to all who took part on Tuesday evening, and in particular to Committee member and Writers in Prison Officer Toni Jordan, who prepared the card-writing

materials with characteristic care and attention to detail. More cards will be posted this week from Melbourne than ever before. This is great news—and perhaps especially noteworthy in view of the 2010 calendar of events through which Melbourne PEN will mark the 50th year of the International PEN Writers in Prison Committee. As Arnold Zable recently observed: in a sense International PEN 'came of age' in 1960 with the establishment of the Writers in Prison Committee. We hope that more members and friends than ever before will join us next year in drawing attention to the history and vital work of this Committee, its supporters and volunteers.

GREEN LIGHT FOR GUERRILLA GARDENERS

By Sue Jackson

At its regular monthly meeting in August, Melbourne's Yarra Council became a green star. Instead of razing local unauthorized street gardens as

it had threatened, it did a complete about-face, voting unanimously to champion them.

Yarra, along with other municipalities, is increasingly dotted with community-initiated gardens. These include registered, secure community gardens that councils approve and support. Then there are the others, guerilla gardens, located in places like planter boxes in the street or on abandoned public land, which are established without prior council approval. As their survival relies on councils turning a blind eye, their future is always precarious.

Guerilla gardeners live with this knowledge, but tend to push it to the back of their minds. At least that had been the case with me and my fellow renegades at Windmill Foodgarden at Tramstop 22, in the inner-city suburb of Clifton hill - right up until the axe fell in early August.

Our plot, established on an ex-nature strip next to a busy

thoroughfare, had been flourishing for over a year.

Locals regularly collected greens for their dinner and pulled weeds as they passed, the kitchen staff at the nearby *Recreation* pub fed the plants with their rinse water and neighbours organized working bees to keep the plot in shape. Despite, or perhaps because of the fact that there are no security fences and the garden is open to all, it had never been vandalized. Instead it had developed into a small but beloved community hub, whose first birthday we had just celebrated in July.

That day the guest of honour was resplendent in violas, herbs, salad greens and veggies, with a stylish girdle of thigh-high fig branch fencing. Guests stood amidst the flapping flags in the icy winds, eating and drinking and talking food. But the birthday cake was barely digested when out of the blue a directive arrived from the council.

We were told to either remove the garden ourselves within 30 days or council officers would pull it down. This notice, which was sent to all unauthorised street gardens in the City of Yarra, was ostensibly concerned about issues of contamination and public risk. But that made no sense to us.

The creators of the Windmill Foodgarden were experienced food growers, who knew what they were doing. One of their main motivations was food security, and they put a lot of research, thought and effort into ensuring that their organic produce would always be in peak condition.

They used deep biodegradable trays, which were dug into place and filled with certified clean soil, for planting. Since then the trays have regularly been topped up with compost. As an added security, only shallow-rooted plants are ever used. The Council's concern about contamination seemed

misguided. As to risk, we were left guessing as to what they could mean.

We wondered if there was concern about dangerous objects like syringes being tossed into the garden, but that had never happened. Also at working bees and when they come to pick produce, people make a point of removing any rubbish. And although the garden abuts the main road, only low-growing plants are used to ensure there is no impediment to motorists' or pedestrians' visibility.

It was a no-brainer; there was no way we were giving up our garden without a fight. But with less than a week until the council meeting, there was no time to lose.

The first step was to open up the lines of communication with the council, especially to reassure councilors that gardeners had taken measures to protect against contamination. Strategy-

planning meetings were organized across the municipality, to which councillors were invited. The town hall was blitzed with emails and phone calls and a petition was circulated.

When I received several prompt and conciliatory replies from councillors in response to my distressed protest email, I felt a twinge of guarded optimism. But the council's original draconian stance was uppermost in our minds as we approached the meeting, and we were also anxious that only a handful of other protestors would turn up.

It was a thrill to find the council chamber packed. Clearly such a large public presence was exceptional and extra chairs had to be brought in to accommodate the 60 or 70 gardeners attending. The council's offer to bring forward the 'Street Gardens' agenda item was the first gesture of good will – an attitude that was to characterise the whole

meeting. All the participants who so desired were given ample opportunity to speak to their submissions, and their wealth of experience was warmly acknowledged by the council. I was relieved and I must confess a bit disappointed that the battle we had expected was looking more and more unlikely to eventuate.

When the irrepressible Glenda Lindsay used her submission time to break into her calypso number *Eat de Street* and the councillors joined in the Mexican wave, it became obvious our prospects were looking good.

Soon after, the council conceded that only two 'minor' complaints had been received about community gardens and no cases of people becoming ill from eating street garden produce had been reported. Before we knew it the council had dropped its decision to destroy our gardens, and instead, voted unanimously to

foster 'creative gardening' across the municipality.

The audience went wild. No doubt this was partly due to the victory for our own individual gardens, but many of us were also thrilled by the whole experience of people power. With little lead time and no hierarchical leadership, a bunch of fired-up enthusiasts had managed to get the bureaucracy to do a 360 degree about-turn, enabling us to save something that is precious to us. It doesn't get better than that. And we can all be sure to do with some wins on the environment front.

As Rebecca Solnit, the inspiring San Francisco-based activist, concludes in her book *Hope in the Dark: the Untold History of People power*, there is no point waiting for governments, be they local or otherwise, to initiate change.

She insists that it's from the margins that new and radical ideas always emerge and get

translated into action. And the margins are certainly where you'll find guerilla gardeners. I'm sure Solnit would appreciate why we didn't need our bikes and cars after the meeting – we all went home walking on air.

Although on occasion guerilla gardeners have received council support, this tends to be for individual gardens, especially famous ones like the Liz Christy Bowery Garden in New York, which was established way back in 1973. It is much more usual for local government to operate from a position of at best indifference or at worst active opposition to unregistered street gardens.

Yarra council, by contrast, had the prescience in the face of popular opposition to totally reverse its negative stance, and to come out in support not merely of a single garden but of guerilla gardens across the municipality. That is why I believe it rates green stardom.

I imagine it's only a matter of time before you'll be able to sign up for an *Edible Street Gardens of Yarra* walking tour. We can guarantee you a warm welcome at Windmill Foodgarden.

This article was first published in newmatilda.com in November 09.

Losing the baggage

By Carole Browne

Japan: why go there? Because of Japan, my father died young of war injuries not long after WWII. In years of travel, I'd always avoided Japan; the emotional baggage was too heavy.

So, why visit now? One good reason: to see my son on his birthday. Ironically, he lives in Osaka. Time to buy maps, phrase books and, for this baby boomer, time to enter the country I swore I would never visit.

August in Osaka is hot, humid and uncomfortable, but a birth date cannot be changed. Each day I carry bottles of water while dodging dense crowds in

markets and malls, avoiding cyclists on pavements or exploring lanes with small, drab doorways.

When one or two old men of my father's vintage pass by in the throngs of young people, the question I had assumed would haunt me - did *they* fight our men in the war?-hardly registers. In spite of myself, I am too intrigued by the endless bowing, the variety of foods on overflowing stalls or the amusing bird sounds made by pedestrian lights. There is also the odd sensation of being in the minority. I see very few other Westerners.

By chance, I arrive in Hiroshima on its most significant date. The sixth of August is the anniversary of the atom bomb being dropped on the city in 1945. A poignant reminder is the soaring A-Bomb Dome, stark and skeletal on the riverbank; the only building left standing after the blast. I wander with the masses past anti-nuclear posters in the vast

Peace Park and by hundreds of small paper cranes symbolising harmony. A schoolchildren's monument features a small girl holding Einstein's formula that helped unleash the atom bomb, $E=mc^2$, engraved in black against the grey granite. I am surprised at the depth of my sadness. Baggage is shifting.

Exhibits in the imposing Peace Museum nearby are even more confronting: burnt, twisted toys, a charred lunch box and raw black-and-white photos taken only hours after the blast. A volunteer guide relates how, as a baby, her mother took her from the city just days before the explosion. The rest of her family perished. This grey haired woman and I are around the same age. Seeing her pain, I hold her hand, without thinking. In that moment war and nationality are forgotten.

She then offers a small white paper plane, handmade with staples and sticky tape. A tiny paper crane nestles between the wings, on each of which are

Japanese words. They translate as: "Riding a thousand winds to a world of love and peace". It is a simple but eerie gift. For this woman has no idea my father once flew a bomber - against her country's forces. As darkness falls, hundreds of lanterns bearing peace messages glide silently down the river. It has been a day of grief, hope and revelation. Baggage is starting to slide.

Over following weeks - in the parks of Nara, on bullet trains, in teeming Tokyo or in the calm of Kyoto's temples - I seldom see old men. The niggling question is wilting. I feel twinges of guilt about actually enjoying the trip: sleeping on tatami mats in traditional inns; meeting the locals; trying their language. Standing in the damp cool forests of Nikko I am taken aback as, strangely, they remind me of the Dandenong Ranges. Baggage slides even further.

Near the end of my stay, a frail, aged Japanese man enters a packed carriage on the Osaka subway. My son stands to offer his seat. After protests, then thanks, the man sinks down next to me. I glance sideways. His eyes are closed. The wilting question stubbornly lurks - did *he* fight in the war? I wait for reaction. Nothing. All I see is a tired old man who deserves a seat.

I will always be immensely proud of my father. But somewhere, somehow, baggage simply slid off and vanished. It really was too heavy, too battered and took up too much room.

Africa Still In Dark Ages

By Seedy Bojang

“It is a shame that after a decade in the 21st Century, when rest of the world is experiencing the outer horizons of the cosmos, we in Africa, are right in the midst of dictatorship and dark ages of conflict”.

These were the words of the Acting Chairperson for the

African Commission on Human and People's `Rights(ACPHR), at a forum on the participation of NGOs in the 46th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the 20th African Human Rights Book Fair, recently held in Banjul, Gambia.

This is no more or less the situation in the African continent, where we are witnessing a redefinition of the electoral process and democracy, whereby the will of the first families is becoming the determinant of government on the continent rather than the will of the people.

While we are experiencing the re-emergence of the banished menace of military coups in some places like Guinea Conakry where the junta is wreaking havoc on innocent lives, the constitutional reversal in certain parts of the continent, such as Niger is painting a gloomy picture of the continent.

In Guinea, violations are grave. In 2005, innocent lives were lost for nothing, and again such a thing happened in 2007, when students were shot for merely venting their dissatisfaction with school results. Again an ugly scenario showed its head in September of this year when about one hundred and fifty unarmed civilians were shot by soldiers at a stadium for merely exercising their constitutional rights.

Recently it's reported that when people drive in flashy cars they are likely to be subjected to molestation and may subsequently lose it to the soldiers.

In Togo, there was a report of a woman accused of drug peddling, who was arrested and detained naked for several days in a tiny cell.

In the case of The Gambia, the issue of missing journalists and the murder of Deyda Hydera, the co-proprietor of the Point

Newspaper, is also taking a toll on the work of journalists, coupled with censorship, witch-hunting and threats on the life of journalists working in the private media.

Also, another scenario has emerged as we have experienced the worst witch-hunting of witchcraft related to human rights abuses by government agents, who raided many villages and homes, abducted hundreds of people, mainly elderly persons alleged to be witches and wizards, took them to an isolated place and forced them to drink magical concoctions. Most of these people died after drinking this concoction, while several others suffered from stomach complications.

This is no doubt a breach of human rights obligations under the African Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human and Peoples' Rights, of which The Gambia is a signatory. Sadly, those alleged to be witches and wizards are

often the poor, elderly women and disabled people.

Many human rights activists working to defend the rights of those accused of witchcraft have been at risk as they have suffered from attacks, threats, and intimidation.

Also, Halipha Sallah, a member of the editorial board of Foroyaa Newspaper who was investigating a report on the issue in the villages of Jambur and Makumbaya, was arrested by state agents and detained for several days before being taken to a court only to be released by the Magistrate.

Anne Bihan (New Caledonia)

Photo © Marc Le Chélar

The Melbourne PEN Centre is pleased to welcome Anne Bihan as an honorary member.



Anne was born in Brittany and has lived in New Caledonia since 1993. Poet and dramaturge, she is the author of, amongst other things, a short *novel Miroirs d'Iles* (1984, Arcane 17) and twelve shows and plays created and performed in Brittany and New Caledonia. In 2005 she collaborated with the Societe Le Nickel to create a collection of portraits and she also regularly contributes poetry, short stories and essays to various reviews including Le Mâche-Laurier, Obsidiane publishers, Archipel des lettres, the review of the Ouessant Islands Book Fair, Litterama'ohi (the French Polynesian Writers' review), Correspondances océaniques, Sillages d'Océanie, and the on-line

crossroads site review www.remue.net .

In 2006 she was part of the New Caledonian delegation invited by the Comédie Française as part of its Semaine de l'Océanie (Oceania Week) and

is a member of the New Caledonia Writers' Association (AENC), the Geopoetic Centre of New Caledonia, the National Association for Research and Action for the Theatre (ANRAT)

She has long been passionate about the question of translation and has been a member of ATLAS (Assises de la traduction littéraire en Arles - Annual Translators' Congress in Arles) since 1987; she is also a representative of the New Caledonian branch of Reporters Without Borders (Reporters sans frontières).

We look forward to many collaborations and Anne has already agreed to work on a project with Berni Janssen and the APWN (Australia Pacific Writers' Network) in 2010.

Refugees

By Annie Huet

They escaped the violence the
terror
and wanted to reach
on these unknown shores

the freedom

This enormous space around
them
the distance, the tides and
current
which brought them onward
ripping them from their world
many miles away,
will it bring them contentment ?

Full of surprise and wonder
they stand before the door
of their new life.
They fear looking backward
and seeing their crucified
country
images of humiliations, tortures
and deaths.

They sit in circles smiling,
sighing,
having no more voice to cry.
The colour of blood
predominates in their dreams.
They are in mutation
oscillating between hope and
despair.
They live in a maze
blindly thrown to another corner
of the world.

A blue softness, a
transparency, a mirage,
this new world so
extraordinarily distinct
will it heal and replace and
bring back
warmth and humanity.

Will these people ever live in
peace
forget the madness of war,
the cries, the pain,
let the ashes fall, let their
anguish behind,
feeling no more lost, no more
blind.

Will they ever
learn again to look at the
clouds,
listen to the soft rain sound of
fountains,
walk fearlessly through the
garden
as flowers close for the night?

CARTHAGE

By Thomas Shapcott

Perhaps it was a land of milk
and honey
But more probably it was
drought-ridden

and subject to all the
inconveniences
Of having a desert over its
shoulder
Nevertheless

It was famous for the quality of
its wine
And certain fruits grew in
abundance
As well as its wheat which was
proverbial.
It was strategically placed
So that it believed itself
invincible.

Think of the permanence of
massive buildings
And all the accoutrements of a
fine harbour
And you have some idea
Of the way in which it saw itself
As the necessary manifestation
Of all that growth and
development stood for.

It is impossible, now, to recall
That this was a place that
called itself
Lucky.
It was destroyed easily
And its arable fields were
planted with salt.

What happened to its
population?
Those who survived ate locusts
And sheltered from the wind of
the desert
In rough dwellings unable to
remember
The basic alphabet.

Exercises

By Anne Carson

Life proceeds pretty much the
way
we've agreed to accept as
normal.

Driving past the local hall – a
muster
in khaki, marching on parade.

Not old enough to be soldiers
fully fledged, more likely
cadets, drilling here, as always.
Suddenly catapulted
to Kandahar or Jerusalem.

Boy soldiers reminding me of
all
we take for
granted.
How much we
take,
without the grace to know

how privileged we are. I don't
know
we can answer for the care
we have not taken in our world

QUOTE

Thank You for Being You

*Thank you for your
kindness*

*Thank you for being
the person you are:
kind and thoughtful,
sensitive and considerate,
generous and thoughtful
givers.*

*You are unselfish always,
putting others before
yourself,
making me feel special
and important.*

*It is a privilege and a
pleasure to work with you.*

(Inspired by the poem of Joanna

Quote: The paper burns, but the words fly away. ~Akiba ben Joseph

Fuchs)

INTERNATIONAL PEN CHARTER

The PEN Charter is based on resolutions passed at its International Congresses and may be summarized as follows:

PEN affirms that:

- 1.** Literature knows no frontiers and must remain common currency among people in spite of political or international upheavals.
- 2.** In all circumstances, and particularly in time of war, works of art, the patrimony of humanity at large, should be left untouched by national or political passion.
- 3.** Members of PEN should at all times use what influence they have in favour of good understanding and mutual respect between nations; they pledge themselves to do their utmost to dispel race, class and national hatreds, and to champion the ideal of one humanity living in peace in one world.
- 4.** PEN stands for the principle of unhampered transmission of thought within each nation and between all nations, and members pledge themselves to oppose any form of suppression of freedom of expression in the country and community to which they belong, as well as throughout the world wherever this is possible.

PEN declares for a free press and opposes arbitrary censorship in time of peace. It believes that the necessary advance of the world towards a more highly organised political and economic order renders a free criticism of governments, administrations and institutions imperative. Since freedom implies voluntary restraint, members pledge themselves to oppose such evils of a free press as mendacious publication, deliberate falsehood and distortion of facts for political and personal end.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

I agree with the PEN charter

**I wish to become a PEN member / an associate*
member**

**MEMBERSHIP OF PEN IS OPEN TO ALL QUALIFIED
WRITERS, EDITORS AND TRANSLATORS WHO
SUBSCRIBE TO THE AIMS OF THE INTERNATIONAL PEN
CHARTER, WITHOUT REGARD TO NATIONALITY,
LANGUAGE, RACE, COLOUR OR RELIGION**

DATE
NAME
ADDRESS
PHONE NO
EMAIL

I enclose a cheque (no cash please) for
Annual Membership fee (waged) \$75
Annual Membership fee (unwaged) \$40
Optional donation for:

Writers in Prison \$ _____

Women Writers Committee \$ _____

*Associate members need not be published writers

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