Staff News

Welcome to our first edition of Refugee Voices for 2009. It has been a very busy and fruitful year so far thanks to the volunteer staff, who work so caringly with the refugees and asylum seekers in our program. These volunteers’ contribution is very valuable; we would have no Refugee Language Program without them.

The Refugee Language Program has begun the year with a number of staff changes. We continue to teach an Academic class on Wednesdays and two classes on Saturdays. One of these classes is a Creative Writing class and we have been lucky to have some dedicated and inspirational teachers working with the students; Anna Maria Dell’osa, a writer, and Lesley Seebold, a filmmaker, www.changefocus.com.au.

Our Intermediate Saturday class is co-taught by Carmen Terceiro and Karen Garlan. Carmen is a TESOL teacher currently studying law and Karen teaches in Medical Education. On Wednesdays, we continue our Academic Writing class with TESOL teacher, Carol Lee. The Academic Writing class as well as the Saturday classes are followed by a discussion and conversation session with volunteers. Following the Saturday classes we take the students for a computer lesson, again with a small group of volunteers.

Helen Corcoran has joined our staff as an office assistant on Wednesdays while she takes a break from High School teaching. She also is working on a one to one basis with a young refugee from the Sudan, helping him improve his essay writing skills for his university course in Social Work.

As you can see from the above short outline, we have a group of very busy people who still can find the time and energy to give so much to our students. The RLP values their contribution enormously.

Creative Writing Project

The RLP won a small grant from the James N Kirby Foundation to produce a book of students’ creative writing. In December 2008, we published an anthology of writing from our students and teachers. The students were thrilled to have their work published and a number of ex-students came back to the centre for the launch.

The title of the book, Some Saturdays, is taken from a poem by one of the creative writing teachers, Alexandra McCormick. She captures perfectly what happens on a Saturday morning in our creative writing class.

Some of us, Some Saturdays

Some of us get here by bus (some two),
Some by train;
Others use their cars; their bikes; feet. We soon know who.

We’ve come through rain, in sun,
Ready to share our stories and make new ones
In the language that this country's run.

Some of us were born here.
Some chose to come.
Some have no say in whether they can stay.

It's Saturday, still early for some.
Usually we start with tea –
How's the family?

Following this we touch on history,
More often than not geography,
And always a good grumble about bureaucracy.

Then it's down, sometimes, to poems:
Acrostics, Ballads,
Other wordy conundrums –

Sometimes it's stories, of times past, to come...
Pen to paper, rooms filled with words
Written, rewritten and read here, over a morning.

Some of us just come once;
Some of us have been here from the start;
Some of us play a more or less temporary part.

Here we are, hear our stories.
Here is where you might find some of us,
Some Saturdays.
Another touching poem in the anthology is by Emanuel Daklo from the Sudan.

**Desire of my heart**

*Love; you flowed into my world as spring’s soft wind*  
*Moving softly, smoothly through my soul*  
*Love: the desire of my heart, the sky of my world*  
*My heart has two things to offer you,*  
*A high respect and a strong perfect love.*

Other contributions include a story about a young refugee who heard her first bomb when she was just 2 years old. Another tells of a mother’s anguish at not knowing if her three children are alive or dead.

If you are interested in buying a copy of this anthology, please contact Lesley on 93516796 or the CPACS office.

**Conferences**

**Creative Communities: Sustainable Solutions to Social Inclusion**

On April 15th 2009, Anna Maria Dell’osa and Lesley Carnus, presented a paper at a *Creative Communities Conference* at Griffiths University. The main thrust of their presentation was the way in which the RLP program allows a group of people, who are very much outsiders, to participate in language study as well as enhance their sense of belonging. They also discussed the publication of the anthology, *Some Saturdays* and Anna Maria described some of the techniques that she uses in class, to assist the students to develop and express their creative selves.

**UniNews**

A story about the Refugee Language Program was published in UniNews in December 2008. A journalist interviewed 2 students, one of the creative writing teachers, Anna Maria and the co-ordinator, Lesley.

The students strongly expressed how important studying with the Refugee Language Program has been to them, and how they considered the staff and the students in the RLP to be part of their family. The story is attached.

**Student News**

*Jean de Dieu*, from Rwanda and *Jallil* from Iraq have recently been granted permanent residency. Both are now studying English with TAFE.

*Merlyn and Tris* have also been granted their PR after a 7-year wait. Merlyn is now a student of Lesley’s in her AMES English class in the evening!

*Aaron*, a young mathematics teacher from Togo won his Permanent Residency as I write this newsletter, (3rd June). A poem that he wrote in class about the 60th anniversary of the UN Declaration of Human Rights was featured on the cover of the PeaceWrites June edition. His cousin, *Carlos*, who arrived with him, has had his application refused.

Another student of ours, *Mohand Limani*, was the subject of an SMH article on Monday, 3rd September.
2007. He receives home tutoring from Lorraine Towers, who teaches in the Koori Centre. Mohand, a delegate for the Berber Citizens Movement, described in the SMH article, how he was detained, interrogated, beaten and sexually assaulted by police. Happily, at the end of 2008, he received his Permanent Residency. Both Lorraine and Mohand were thrilled, of course, and their story appears in our anthology Some Saturdays.

Congratulations to all these fine people.

Many of our students are engaged in a continual battle with Immigration, the Refugee Review Tribunal and the Federal Court. Their battles often continue for years and we wish them every success and an ensuing safe haven in our country.

Film Reviews

Missing Water
Director: Khoa Do

Review by Lesley Carnus

Khoa Do’s film about his own family’s flight from Vietnam, won the CRC Award at this year’s Sydney Film Festival. It is a very powerful film which uses the one basic set, the clothing sweatshop where Do’s mother worked.

One day, his mother sees a little stuffed toy monkey on the desktop of a co-worker. This triggers a flood of memories of her tragic trip by boat to Australia with her little sister, a young man and her ‘uncle’.

The acting is excellent, the build-up of emotions is very intense and Do’s film does his mother’s story great honour.

The staging of the film, where the audience had to imagine the family was on a boat, rather than in a sweatshop, would have perhaps worked better as a play but nevertheless this is an extremely powerful film.

The intensity of the emotions certainly allowed the audience to realize the suffering that Do’s family and community endured. As Do notes, 1,500,000 left Vietnam by boat; only 900,000 made it to land.

Missing Water

Reviewed by Justin (a refugee studying with RLP)

Justin found the movie to be a very worthwhile one but was worried by the director’s decision to stage the film in the dreary space of the workshop. He found himself feeling more depressed by the setting than the actual story. He wrote, “instead of being shocked by the story I was rocked by the way the director told it”. Justin did feel that the film was very powerful and extremely well-acted.

Book Review

The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty by Peter Singer

Review by Lesley Carnus

Peter Singer is a great man. His latest book, The Life You Can Save, answers many of the questions that people ask themselves before they donate to charity.

The first question asked would probably be “Why donate”? Singer outlines the many reasons that he considers it an imperative that we donate to alleviate the despair of those living in poverty. He analyses the amounts that are already given by prosperous nations and debunks the mantra that money given to extremely poor nations, is money wasted! “Look at the millions that are thrown at these countries and still nothing has improved”. This is often the excuse that many governments and individuals use to justify withholding donations to the poor.

Singer researches the amount of aid that many Western countries give, and to whom they are giving, and comes up with some very revealing data. He suggests ways in which we can give, that will maximize the positive effect of our dollar on the lives of the recipients.

He also discusses the self-promotional aspect of giving to charity. Pop stars and media stars, such as Madonna and Bono, may give, but they also get a tremendous amount of good press in return. “Is this really charity”, he asks? Is good, done for the wrong reasons, still good?

Peter Singer, donates a third of his earnings to charity, so in purchasing this book you will also be making a donation. After hearing Peter Singer speak at the Sydney Writers’ Festival in 2006, I decided to donate regularly to Medicins Sans Frontieres. I then increased my monthly donation this year. After reading Singer’s latest book, I donated to both the Fred Hollows Foundation and the Fistula Hospital in Ethiopia. Why am I telling you this? Is this not boasting? Read “The Life You Can Save” and find out Peter Singer’s position on this.

This review will now segue into asking you, the reader for a donation.

The Senate, through the Vice Chancellor, has funded the
program for another year but the entire grant pays for the co-ordinator’s salary and the salary of attendants who supervise the building on Saturdays while our classes are operating.

We would like you to donate a small amount to the RLP which we will use to help pay for the lunches that we provide after Saturday classes. Many of our students survive on only $100 a week, that they receive from the Red Cross.

We also use private donations to help pay students’ travel costs to classes. Many of our students are not permitted to work or study; so don’t have a travel concession card. A donation, 2 years ago, from Sydney University Staff Refugee Support Group (SUSRSG) enabled the co-ordinator to subsidize travel costs. We hope to continue this initiative this year. If you would like to support us, please address your cheque to the Refugee Language Program. The University will acknowledge any donation you make and issue a receipt.

Could you also forward this newsletter to any colleague or friend who may be interested in reading about the work of the program. You can read more about us in the latest PeaceWrites at www.arts.usyd.edu.au/cpacs, and on the Refugee Language Program website at www.arts.usyd.edu.au/centres/cpacs/research

This newsletter is intended for the refugees studying in our classes, colleagues and students at the University of Sydney, as well as those decent people who are interested in human rights.

Lesley Carnus
Refugee Language Program
Mackie Building K01 University of Sydney
93516796