Learningguild Letter

Dear members and friends of Learningguild,

Anyone who seriously engages with the question of Australian policy towards asylum-seekers needs to ask both what should not and what should be done. The primary error of both major parties has been in neither maintaining the paramountcy of our obligations under the UN Refugee Convention nor aiming at wide-ranging agreement with Indonesia and other countries in our region. Because the Greens and not the major parties are firm on those priorities, Margaret and I voted for them in the Federal election of 2013. Now (December 2014) the Coalition Government has managed to get the support of just enough cross-benchers in the Senate, through concessions desirable in themselves, for a bill to minimize our commitment to proper courts of appeal and international obligations and to reintroduce TPVs (temporary protection visas) with all the anxiety and insecurity they cause.

I must here give references. First, Janet Phillips of the Parliamentary Library has produced a very fair and careful survey dated 28 February 2014, found by googling her name and 'Australian Policy Online': "A comparison of Coalition and Labor government asylum policies in Australia since 2001". It brings out how similar the two sets of policies have been, except for Labor's opposing TPVs. There is, however, a group called Labor for Refugees, which seeks reform of the party's policies. A speech in May by the Secretary Mr Robin Rothfield includes this:

> The Commission of Audit has revealed that it costs $400,000 a year to hold an asylum seeker in offshore detention, $239,000 to hold them in detention in Australia, and less than $100,000 for an asylum seeker to live in community detention. In contrast, it is around $40,000 for an asylum seeker to live in the community on a bridging visa while their claim is processed.

A vivid and hard-hitting speech ("Without justice there will not be peace") was given by the barrister Julian Burnside on November 5th, on his receipt of the Sydney Peace Prize. Two days later there was an article (in *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*) by Malcolm Fraser and Barry Jones, "Perverse migration bill shreds the rule of law", attacking the bill mentioned above. After it had just passed the Senate, Greg Barns posted a response on the ABC's *Drum* (December 5th), and Adam Morton summarized in *Sunday Age* (the 7th). On the 2nd the ABC had brought to our attention the post-traumatic suffering of naval officers who had been compelled under the Gillard or Rudd Labour Government to maintain secrecy about policies that were not sufficiently aimed at saving lives of refugees at sea.

How extraordinary and revealing it is that a former Liberal Prime Minister and a former Labor Science Minister should combine to indict a Government in which the majority party is one called Liberal. Fraser no longer belongs to the party he once led. It went rightwards under John Howard. I intend to contrast elsewhere Tony Abbott's defective kind of low-tax, few-controls liberalism with the caring and compassionate kind distinguished from it as early as 1881 by Oxford's T.H.Green. Like the late Victorian Premier Dick Hamer, Fraser stands within or very close to that kind of liberalism.

There are at least three categories of asylum-seekers to be distinguished. The great majority of **all** of them have well-founded fears of persecution if they were to stay in or return to their native country. There are those now living in subsidized housing in Australia, those in detention camps within or beyond it, and those whose only way of escape still seems to them to be to get on a boat to Australia. (As Burnside points out on p.3, "the aeroplane people – thousands of them", who can come that way because they are fortunate enough to have a passport, can readily get an initial visa and then a bridging one before their claims are assessed.)

I know most about the first category, which includes some of our members. I help them with English and we cooperate in developing a vegetable garden whose produce they share. Other members help in other ways. Their main burdens, apart from some sense or experience of being under suspicion, are the utter uncertainty about when if at all their claims for permanent or even temporary protection will be considered and their being prevented from entering paid employment. It is impossible to avoid the judgment that life is made unattractive in these ways to incline their thoughts to giving up and to discourage others.

As Fraser and Jones have said, the latest bill "makes it easier to send more people back to harm, rather than offering them protection". They will be subject to "fast-track" decision-making, with appeal only to the Minister, and, ridiculously, may be advised to go back and "modify their behaviour", or rejected from lack of documents. They will receive only TPVs (temporary protection visas), which, because of the limbo they involve, can "break people who managed to survive torture". (A valuable further source for comment on the implications of the bill is The Conversation.)

What of those in detention camps? Let us first take note how many such camps there are. A list on Wikipedia lists twenty as operational, of which seventeen are in Australia and one is on each of Christmas Island, Manus Island and Nauru.

Julian Burnside has described (from the foot of his p.6) the cruel and inhumane treatment given to asylum-seekers, including confiscation of medical appliances and refusal or inadequate provision of aids such as incontinence pads. He also provides a sworn statement from an eyewitness to the murder of Reza Barati on Manus Island. One of his conclusions (p.8) is "Australia is now judged by its behaviour as cruel and selfish. We treat frightened, innocent people as criminals. It is a profound injustice."

An Amnesty International investigation of the detention centre on Manus Island in November 2013 found conditions to be extremely inadequate. Katie Young posted on the 12th of December this summary:

> There is no reason why a policy that costs in excess of $1 billion a year cannot provide asylum seekers with sufficient drinking water, shade from the sun, sanitation, health facilities to treat serious illnesses, protection from mosquitoes or proper clothing such as shoes.

That sentence itself suggests two huge changes that should be urged on the Labor Opposition and the cross-benchers. First there must be an end to cruelty and extreme deprivation (of kinds that would not be allowed in the administration of our prisons), and secondly the ridiculous expenditure on offshore detention should be replaced by moderate spending on brief detention before undelayed and fair consideration of claims to refugee status. We might add that if what Julian Burnside has said (p.6) be correct, then Bill Shorten and Tony Burke must be repeatedly urged to speak the truth about those who have arrived or may arrive by boat.

> … neither in opposition nor in government has Labor stated authoritatively that boat people are not "illegal"; that they commit no offence by coming here the way they do to seek protection from persecution; that they are not a danger to us; that they are escaping the same extremists we are fighting in the Middle East; and that there is no queue.

More and more of us, whether committed to Labor or (as I am) to a caring liberalism, should warn the Labor Opposition that we are likely to vote at Federal level for the Greens because their policies are humane ones. They rightly urge that many new places "should go to urgently resettling assessed refugees directly from our immediate region as recommended by the Houston Panel".

We turn to the question what we Australians' proper contribution ought to be to meeting the needs of the enormous numbers of refugees worldwide, and therefore our policy concerning those who may still attempt to sail in unseaworthy boats from Indonesia towards Australia.

First, we should insist that any party or parties that deserve to govern us should uphold and act upon international law and human rights. Secondly, they should respect, study and learn from what is done elsewhere, e.g. in Italy, where numbers of boats and of refugees are far greater. Thirdly, and urgently, our representatives should explore with those of Indonesia what can be done jointly, along with UNHCR, to consider claims to refugee status early enough to make recourse to boats unnecessary. There has been a wretched tendency of the Australian Minister, to the annoyance of the Indonesian Government, to act without sufficient consultation or cooperation.

Neither Australia nor Indonesia can afford to welcome, in addition to genuine refugees, people who are merely "economic migrants", and that exclusion

has to be explained, publicized and enforced impartially. But an undelayed and fair procedure, employing experts and in humane environments, is the only morally tolerable way to deal with those who seek asylum, and without it Australia's reputation as a land of a fair go will continue to decline. The Greens' aims include (no. 14) "Greatly enhanced regional cooperation in the Asia-Pacific to provide safer pathways for asylum seekers, with long-term planning to accommodate people displaced by ongoing conflicts and climate change." Instead the present Government has done deals with PNG, Nauru and recently even Cambodia that have two major weaknesses: they inflict suffering on refugees and they reduce Australia's influence on these countries, who are emboldened to say "You want us to help you in these ways, so don't try to influence the way we use whatever you send us in aid."

As Labor for Refugees urges, we must keep asking how the enormous amounts of money now spent in harsh policies could go more beneficially and economically in more humane ones. We can give credit to the Minister, Scott Morrison, for providing Safe Haven Enterprise Visas to allow refugees to go to rural areas where local governments recognize the need for labour and will support the visa-holders, and for saying (but non-misleadingly?) that he will give

TPV-holders the right to employment, but still maintain that such visas should be no bar to permanent residence and citizenship once a good track record has been established.

There are wider policies to be adopted. We need to revivify many rural areas by providing many new avenues of employment, and the necessary employment-providing infrastructure, for the sake of rural communities and their potential new inhabitants, and to allay the fears of unreasonable competition for scarce jobs.

We should also work in the UN, the Commonwealth and elsewhere for the acceptance of the principle that any country with the reality or danger of murderous conflict and persecution should be required, as a condition of further aid, to accept neutral observers and panels of advisers, who would do the kinds of mediatory work that former President Jimmy Carter has done so extensively (see the website of the Carter Center). The Common-wealth must be ready to insist that a country such as Sri Lanka accept the need and value of such independent observers on pain of sanctions if it does not.

John Howes

We are known as the most inhumane, the most uncaring, the most selfish of all the wealthy countries. It used not to be that way. ….

This legislation gives to the minister, Scott Morrison now, or whoever it may be in the future, total arbitrary, dictatorial, tyrannical powers over the lives and fortunes of asylum seekers. It destroys the "rule of law" as we know it.

Under the UN Refugee Convention, which Menzies signed onto in 1954, boat people were not illegal. The treaty says that those fleeing terror often travel by unorthodox means and often without papers. ….

In short then, the government is no longer committed to the UN Refugee Convention. This new law strips out references to the convention. They are replaced by a new definition of 'refugee' that drops the longstanding commitment to non-refoulement [not "driving back"].

Malcolm Fraser, the former Liberal Prime Minister, at the opening of new premises for the Asylum Seekers Resource Centre in Footscray, Victoria, 10 December 2014.

A Social Safety-Net

ANTHONY CLUNIES-ROSS, *an Australian and a member of Learningguild, has been a professor at Strathclyde University, in Glasgow, Scotland, since 1974 and is now Emeritus Professor. A textbook in development economics that he and two colleagues wrote was reviewed in* L'g Letter *1.2010. He and one of them, Mozammel Huq, have this year published the book he mentions on p.7.*

There are certain forms and degrees of poverty that the world should not tolerate. That is a proposition that I believe and hope would have or win the assent of most people who think and care about such matters. Any constructive attempt to define those forms and degrees must of course depend on a set of value-judgments, explicit or implicit. It would need to rest too on some assessments of what might be technically and politically possible at the time the value-judgments were made. And it could be expected to change as the underlying conditions in the world changed.

The idea of a social safety-net is for a minimum, a lower limit, to what will be tolerated: capacity to acquire a bare minimum of food (with some other essentials) guaranteed for everyone. In spite of all the variety across the world in what is technically possible, some idea can be formed of what that minimum might reasonably be. At whatever level such a minimum is set, there will be plenty of households which, left to themselves, will fail to meet it. The gap would have to be filled by "the state" (governments) or "civil society" (voluntary activity and contributions). Besides governments there are many organizations each aiming to meet some part, often a very small fraction, of the pressing need felt by people across the world for basic essentials.

Unfortunately the sum total of poverty – in the form of the deprivation and suffering that ought, with current technology, to be avoidable – has seemed to many too great for anything government or private individuals might do to make an appreciable difference. This may be a comforting or a discomforting illusion, but defeatism on the matter is only too easy. Until we fix on some definitions, separate out some aspects or subdivisions of poverty that can be measured, and begin identifying reasonable medium-term targets, the subject can seem vast, complex and unfathomable.

The promulgation by the UN General Assembly in the year 2000 of eight "Millennium Development Goals" (MDGs) was an attempt to make some very rudimentary analysis of poverty, and to present the world with tasks that might seem finite, operational, and manageable, so as to direct the efforts of governments, charities, and private philanthropists into alleviating some of the most pressing aspects of world poverty.

With one very important exception, this paper is concerned only with the aspect of poverty expressed by the first MDG: **eradicate extreme poverty and hunger**. That wording is confusing. But it is clear from the discussion of this first MDG that, rather than addressing the whole field of poverty – which would have to include the lack or inadequacy of accessible clean water, medical services, and schooling, and the presence of endemic and epidemic diseases, and much else – this goal is in fact concerned only with the deficiency of what is called here disposable income, that is the income, in cash or in kind, whose use is at the disposal of households and their members: not only cash income but also the value of home-produced goods including much food, clothing, and shelter. Very crudely we can say that disposable income is a strand in a person's total income to which we can readily attach numbers on a single scale.

Extreme poverty in disposable income for any household would indicate that its disposable income per head was below an extreme-poverty borderline. In the figures used by the World Bank, that borderline has been fixed since 2008 at the purchasing power of 1.25 US dollars per day as valued at 2005 US prices. That, to put it mildly, is not a lot. It is not the value of goods and services that an actual $US1.25 a day might buy in, say, Dhaka or Lagos, but the much lesser amount that it would buy in New York or Peoria, Illinois. It has been calculated as enough to sustain life, but only just, with very little left over for, say, any social events or celebrations or gifts that might be regarded as socially necessary. It is no surprise that, in countries such as Bangladesh, where large segments of the people are in extreme poverty, most children have recently shown symptoms of malnutrition.

This might suggest that the $1.25 extreme-poverty borderline is set too low to be taken as a measure of what is just adequate. But the painful fact is that around 1.3 to 1.4 billion people, perhaps a fifth of the world's population, fall below the line. Modest as an aspiration to move them just above the line may seem, doing so would surely be a memorable achievement, and perhaps a platform for subsequently aiming higher.

Distribution, not cost, the difficult part

It is bad news certainly that the numbers living in extreme poverty of disposable income are so immense. But there is a benign paradox: the good news is that the total **extreme-poverty gap** – the annual amount of cash in convertible currency that, if spread precisely where it was needed, would be just enough to bring all those 1.3-1.4 billion people above the line – is around $US 80 billion, which is only about 0.2 per cent, **one five-hundredth**, or less, of world income (which stands at around $US 50 trillion). That $US 80 billion is markedly less than, for example, the total that the (mainly rich) OECD countries as a group have been giving each year in foreign aid. Even if hypothetically those OECD countries maintained their recent levels of foreign-aid spending on other elements of assistance to low-income and middle-income countries, adding the $US 80 billion or so needed to fill the extreme disposable-income-poverty gap would not be out of the question.

So, if it were just a matter of providing enough cash each year to fill the gap, the rich world could easily do so several times over while scarcely feeling the pinch. But distributing the cash so that it went into just the right hands, those of the most needy, would be another matter, and, whatever way might be devised of making sure that virtually no one was left below the line, there would inevitably have to be some "overkill" in the cost. Moreover, attractive as is the idea that the rich states would pay for the gap-filling, in the world as it is they would almost certainly not pay for all of it, and each state, however poor, would need to take the initiative in providing its own safety-net, however much help in meeting the need it would hope to muster from abroad.

The World Bank divides countries by per capita income into four categories: high-income, upper-middle-income, lower-middle-income, and low-income. Insofar as there is a world aspiration to close the gap, it might be accepted that governments in the huge category of middle-income countries, both upper and lower, should each take financial responsibility for their own populations in this matter, while the countries of high income, which account for about 16 per cent of the world's people and 75 per cent of its income, provide deliberate help in gap-filling to the low-income fraternity, which is concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of South Asia, and makes up about 20 per cent of world population but only 1.4 per cent of world income.

It must be added that, to make the disposable-income safety-net fulfil its function of keeping every household out of extreme poverty in disposable income, we need to add a further condition. Each household should be enabled to avoid "impoverishing" medical expenses. That would imply some form of medical insurance, contributory or non-contributory or a mixture of both. The costs to the state of the non-contributory element might have to be substantial. What I say here about the costs of a safety-net excludes these costs except where otherwise stated. But I shall not ignore them. (See reference to the Thai model below.)

Fears and reservations

Three main fears are commonly expressed over the creation by governmental action in any country of a safety-net in disposable income.

First, there is the worry that it might discourage effort and enterprise. This is possible. But also possible is that the extra income for the very poor would enable them to make small investments, either material or human, and would embolden them to do so if they were given confidence by the safety-net arrangements that they would be supported if a venture turned out badly. The evidence seems on balance to favour fairly strongly the optimistic side of this debate.

Second, it is said, "targeting", that is identifying those households most in need of income supplements, might be too difficult. It may be replied that there are a number of ways of identifying the poorest households (means-testing by asking directly; "quasi-means-testing" from visible signs; "community-based", or age-based, or geographically-based, means assessment), each of which may give a more or less adequate way of separating the extremely poor from those not quite so poor; and two or more of these methods may be used together to give a more accurate result than any one of them alone. (See also what is said below of "self-targeting" through public-works employment, as now practised in India.)

Third, it may be argued that only economic growth can be an adequate remedy for world poverty, and that growth might be impeded by diversion into income supplements for the poorest of resources that might otherwise have been used for investment in companies or government enterprises. This is answered partly by my response to the first objection. More generally, there is very little presumption that the small sums going into income supplements for the poorest would otherwise have served significantly to augment efficient investment.

Methods of financing safety-nets

There are at least six possible methods of paying for the completion of safety-nets: reallocation of existing outlays, additional taxation, incoming foreign-grant aid, borrowing domestically, borrowing from abroad, and money-creation. Each of the six may be appropriate in certain circumstances, though the last three have obvious limitations. Because many developing countries spend so much on subsidizing foodstuffs and energy in ways that actually redis-tribute real income in favour of the rich, there is an overwhelming case for reallocating these subsidies first before other sources of finance have to be tapped.

Even if we concentrate on reallocation to finance it, there are various ways of contributing to the construction of a safety-net. Here are three examples of moves in that general direction.

1. Avoiding impoverishment arising from medical expenses: the Thai model

For low-income families, paying the full cost of a major surgical operation may be simply impossible without extensive borrowing that may lead a family into a deepening abyss of debt. What is needed in each country is a scheme of medical insurance in the broadest sense of the term.

Thailand, a lower-middle-income country, does seem, since 2003, to have gone close to providing a very wide range of medical/surgical services and covering the cost so that no one is impoverished by having to pay.

Very roughly one-third of the Thai population is covered by high-level services financed either pri-vately or by fairly conventional contributory medical insurance, in principle self-supporting but mainly state-organized. These arrangements are accessible to families of public servants and employees in organized enterprises (and to private individuals who can pay for them independently).

The remaining two-thirds of the people are served by a separate "universal cover" system of primary clinics and hospitals that, apart from residents of some very remote settlements, goes close to being comprehensive in the people it covers. Roughly half of these people, the less poor half, use this system on payment of a very low "nominal" fee (about the equivalent of a US dollar) per item of service. The other half, a third or so of the total population, are not charged. Evidence suggests that, in spite of these ostensibly generous financial arrangements, the quality of basic services in Thailand does not suffer: the International Labour Organisation uses Thailand as a standard of service adequacy on its two main criteria.

2. Self-targeting through public-works employment: the Indian model.

India since 2006 has run a scheme under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act that in principle operates across all rural areas, where it offers each household on demand up to 100 hours per year of manual work on public projects paid at close to the locally prevailing wage-rate. The idea is that, if a household is sufficiently needy, one of its members will take up some or all of the employment offer. Organizing the work and the pay for it is a huge logistical task: in the hands of the Indian States, but of course depending critically on very local administration. Unsurprisingly, after the first few years, the record of the scheme had been less than perfect. The employment guarantee of the scheme's title had by no means been completely fulfilled: perhaps in the first few years only about half of those who wanted work under the scheme got it. But it does seem that some addition to income from the scheme had gone by 2010-11 to about a third of rural households, in return for work on environmental and infrastructure projects.

India has in hand other anti-poverty innovations. In view partly of the belief that much of the funds on anti-poverty and other projects has been misappro-priated, an attempt is being made to produce a biometric-identification "passport" for every person. A main purpose is to enable everyone to have an individual bank account into which money can be transferred electronically, from the central government if necessary, so avoiding all inter-mediaries. There is a parallel move afoot (frustrated

in the recent past but now believed to be backed by the Modi government) to replace subsidies on foodstuffs and energy, which have, as elsewhere, been a highly inefficient method of poverty relief, by cash transfers to named persons.

3. Conditional cash transfers (CCTs): the Latin model

Mexico from 1997 and Brazil somewhat later have practised a system of regular monthly cash payments to poor families with children on condition that the parents keep the children in school and follow prescribed health procedures such as vaccination. The aim is both to supplement the present incomes of poor families and to contribute to the future health and education of the children. The practice has spread to other Latin countries. It requires scrupulous record-keeping, but this seems usually to have been provided. It appears to be universally popular. I have seen no mention of any difficulty over deciding which families are poor and therefore eligible if they fulfil the health and schooling provisions.

In Brazil recently twelve million families were said to be receiving the cash transfers. At five to a family, this would mean that about two-thirds of the country's population were in households benefiting.

Furthermore …

Other examples can be found. There are stirrings in the safety-net direction within a number of big middle-income countries such as China (which has also recently shown amazing reductions in the numbers of the extremely poor, mainly as a by-product of rapid economic growth) and Indonesia; and also – spurred on and monitored on the countries' own initiatives by the ILO and other UN agencies – in some of the very poor countries, such as Vietnam, now on the low-income borderline, and Mozambique, recently among the very poorest.

A fuller discussion of these matters is given in the book written by Mozammel Huq and myself, *The Universal Social Safety-Net and the Attack on World Poverty* (Routledge, 2014). This also gives a detailed appraisal of the microcredit movement in Bangladesh, which, in our opinion and those of many others, has made an enormous contribution to the reduction of extreme poverty in that country, overwhelmingly under non-governmental auspices, and with a somewhat different focus from the quest for a social safety-net. We believe it is a complement to that safety-net rather than a substitute for it.

An invaluable treasure-trove of examples of actions to help fill the extreme poverty gap (presented in an analytic context) is a 2008 World Bank publication, *For Protection and Promotion*, by Margaret Grosh and others. The title is intended to convey that redistributive action against extreme poverty may be an ally, rather than a rival, of the expansion of production.

Another wonderful book, as readable as a novel but closely tied to well-attested empirical findings, is *Poor Economics: a radical rethinking of the way to fight global poverty*, by Abhijit V Banerji and Esther Duflo, published by Public Affairs in 2011.

The globalization of higher education! Mozammel Huq, Anthony's colleague at Strathclyde, in Scotland, is from Bangladesh and maintains his participation in the development of universities and colleges there. He and others organize visits by groups of Strathclyde students to help in the study of English as higher education gets underway in the rural north of Bangladesh. He has invited me to come next year, and I have begun to correspond with one of the organizers with a view to a possible visit late in the year.

At the end of the last issue (2.2013) is a copy of a letter from me to Syano Musyimi and students he had invited into a branch of Learningguild at Bristol University, England. He is a Kenyan who has just completed Bristol's Ph.D. in philosophy, and I met him at a conference at Wollongong, Australia! He will be maintaining contact with me in responses to my book *Making up Sentences*.

JH

U3A Mornington: challenges past and present

HANS EISEN *was formerly a company manager and in the time of the Cain Government in the 1980s Director-General of the Victorian Department of Industry, Technology and Resources. He tells of his experience as President of U3A (the University of the Third Age) in the Mornington Peninsula, to the south-east of Melbourne. Hans is a member of Learningguild.*

U3A is a non-profit worldwide organisation for educational self-help. It draws on the wealth of knowledge and experience of its members to set up study groups and organise a range of activities. The driving forces are lifelong learning and active socialisation.

The movement commenced in 1972 in Toulouse, France to provide older people with access to courses in the humanities and natural sciences. The idea spread rapidly in France and to other countries in continental Europe. Today there are U3As in 36 countries and on all continents. In Australia the first was established in Melbourne in 1984 and now there are campuses in all states and territories.

In Victoria there are 106 U3As with a total membership of more than 33,000. U3A Mornington, to which I have belonged for six years, was started in 1990 and has 1050 members. Our organisation is run entirely by volunteers. Each year we present about 175 courses and activity programs.

Like some other volunteer-led organisations, our U3A asks each new member to indicate areas of its activities in which they could assist. My error was to tick 'Administration'! Within a few weeks I was asked to accept appointment to the vacant position of Vice-President at that time. I accepted, but said "Please note that I will not serve as President." Three months into the U3A year the President resigned. There was no alternative to my serving as President for the remainder of the term of office. I am now in my third (and last) year as President.

On becoming more familiar with our U3A, I realized that two issues had to be addressed. The first concerned the very long hours worked by the volunteers who administered enrolment, allocation of classes and activities, allotment of rooms, and collection and banking of class fees. The organisation would be at risk if any of the volunteers in this area was obliged or chose to resign. The second was the lack of sufficient accommodation on our small campus to provide for the rapidly increasing membership.

From long executive experience I knew that a manager's first responsibility is to ensure the continuity of the organisation. Any threats to that need prompt attention.

Though our U3A used a database system for administration, it was limited in scope and failed to obviate long hours of work by key members. So we first specified all the functions and reports which ideally we required of a database membership system. An experienced member then searched for software developers to assist us to design a system to meet that specification. A firm was selected and after seven or eight months we had a system ready for the year-end enrolment.

Our MASS (Membership Administration Software Solution) enables those of our members prepared to use their own computers to enrol themselves, select courses, and pay membership fees. In the first year about half our members did so. Others, who either did not have a computer or were not willing to use MASS, were assisted by volunteers who keyed in data from application forms brought to our campus on Enrolment Day. The resultant saving in workload on volunteers was most impressive.

Our other challenge, that of finding sufficient accommodation, has involved exploring various possible solutions, to date without success.

We rent facilities owned by the Mornington Peninsula Shire at the Currawong Community Reserve in Mornington. We share most of them (class rooms and a hall) with other community organisations. We are sole occupants of some, one of which is a portable classroom. U3A initiated its purchase and paid some 60% of the cost. In return we have a ten-year rent-free lease.

We sought Shire approval for a second portable classroom. A suitable location on our heritage-listed site was agreed with the Shire's Heritage Planner. Then, helped by a consultant, we prepared a Planning Permit Application. After two years of frustration, the Shire agreed to advertise it – and there were fifty

objections from neighbours. Their concern was that a new classroom would result in even more parking by members in streets surrounding our campus. Parking is already an issue: the car park capacity is 64 and at peak we need 150 car spaces! We abandoned that application.

We have not yet found other accommodation. We are exploring the possibility of obtaining from the Shire a long-term lease of land on which to construct new facilities, which we would fund.

Most organisations present challenges to their managers. For us the redeeming feature is the excitement provided by the creativity and diligence of tutors (all volunteers) who enable our members to pursue learning, new experiences and active socialisation. I frequently invite senior citizens who are not yet members to come to the most exciting venue for them on the Mornington Peninsula!

More about exploration: Ernest Giles

JAMES TULIP, *formerly Associate Professor of English Literature at Sydney University, is a member of Learningguild who, on reading Hilary Howes's article in* L'g L *1.2013 on the explorer Ludwig Leichardt, asked for her address, arranged to meet her in Berlin in August this year, and has sent this response to his discovery of her work. (What a delight for an editor!) Hilary, one of my nieces, has recently been appointed to a research position at the Australian National University in Canberra, and so will soon be leaving the Australian Embassy in Berlin. JH*

To read Hilary Howes on Ludwig Leichhardt was to be carried along in a direction both unexpected and at the same time wonderfully satisfying. I am myself deeply interested in Australian explorers, Ernest Giles in particular.

To see how a new generation of scholars is coming to look at the Australian past, to meet Leichhardt not merely as an eccentric hero figure but in a perspective wider than the Australia-England one, to be plunged into a time and a culture when science and exploration shared a common aura – all of these experiences seem to arise out of the role and presence of Germany spreading its influence throughout the world, especially in the nineteenth century, and reaching Australia and the Pacific in particular ways and personalities. These were insights I gathered from Hilary's essay and the books she recommended.

A further surprise was finding her doctoral work on a related topic published in book form as recently as 2013. *The Race Question in Oceania: A.B. Meyer and Otto Finsch between metropolitan theory and field experience, 1865-1914*, appeared as Volume 12 of Germanica Pacifica, Peter Lang Edition. It is an illuminating account of the re-searches of two German scholar-travellers experiencing Papua-New Guinea. Contrary to much European thought, they found the people and their way of life full of interest and demanding respect. Yet it did not stop them running into prejudices, value-judgments and theories when they came to publish their material in the circles of metropolitan academic scholarship. It was an approach that has had to wait more than a century to receive the treatment offered here.

Hilary brings impressive resources to bear on her subject. Several European languages, archival discoveries, her time among scholars at the Australian National University and her own wide-ranging reading of published research as shown in bibliographies and appendices – all mark the thesis as an outstanding achievement. Yet she does not see her work as an isolated process. It is the cultural depth of German humanistic explorations that underlies her subject-matter and approach. From the early nineteenth century, figures such as Alexander Humboldt and his brother Wilhelm created models in themselves as scientists in fields from botany to geography and from political theory to education.

Their influence has flowed on powerfully to the present day. Her dissertation, now in book form, makes Hilary a focus for representing the current phase of the study of the German Enlightenment.

I write this from a background of rediscovering (for myself at least) the figure of Ernest Giles, the Australian explorer who in the 1870s, the same time as A.B. Meyer, completed the journey Leichhardt had attempted and failed to complete. Giles is probably the least known of the major Australian explorers, yet perhaps the most readable. His two-volume account of crossing from the Centre to the West Coast of the continent, *Australia Twice Traversed*, may be seen as a climax of the first great wave of Australian exploration, especially of the Centre. He made two frustrating attempts, setting out from the just-established transcontinental telegraph line. This was in 1872-3. Yet these failures were from a literary point of view his triumphs; there are great situations here waiting to be tapped by writers. When he had access to camels, success came his way. However, as for McDouall Stuart, life after exploration proved disappointing for Giles.

The question how to read and see Giles from the perspectives that Hilary has opened up is a challenge and a stimulation. The 1870s are a significant decade. Meyer in NW New Guinea and Giles at the Centre are in different worlds, yet linked by the explorer's gene. Meyer had little financial backing apart from his own money. Giles depended on Baron von Mueller in Melbourne as a patron, and eventually on the Royal Society in London for recognition. The times were marked scientifically by the evolutionary theories of Charles Darwin and Alfred Wallace; nationally, they were for Europeans the years following the Franco-Prussian War, those of Germany's gradual move towards greater unity and power. As for Britain, Giles in the deserts of Australia might have been experiencing an end to the dream of its empire. Looking for good water and good pasture, he and others were walking over rocks and earth that a century later would be worth a fortune. If the dream still existed, it existed in the minds and hearts of the people – the young men especially – who fifty years later would cross the world to fight for Britain against the Germans. The story is fraught with ironies.

Letter

From the Rev. Dr Sandy Yule, of Melbourne.

Dear John,

Thank you for the invitation to respond to your long letter in *Learningguild Letter* 2.2013.

I have read your letter with interest and appreciation. As I am happy for you to publish this response, I should mention that you and I met in the Student Christian Movement in the early 1960s, that I taught philosophy in a teachers' college for twenty years, and that I am now a retired minister of the Uniting Church. I fully appreciate the value of attending to voices that oppose our own understanding and of encountering other views at their best.

I have personally found Christian faith to be a sustaining basis for these encounters. Faith is not knowledge, but neither is it ignorance. It is best viewed as an intellectual and emotional container within which doubt, exploration and certainties shape and explain our experience. There can be a choice of container, but it seems to me that refusing existing containers simply generates the need to put together our own. One benefit that I find in the Christian container is that sustaining the intellectual and moral fabric of the universe is not down to me.

Explaining the Christian doctrine of original sin in terms of human pride has a long history (and Reinhold Niebuhr's Gifford lectures *The Nature and Destiny of Man* have given influential expression to it). Nevertheless, I would agree that this cannot stand as a fully adequate expression of the theological concept of sin in more ordinary terms. There is the obvious fact that there are six other traditionally specified "deadly sins" and that pride is often "proper", that is, a force for good. What I find valuable in the theological term 'sin' is not the moral condemnation that it typically suggests, but the recognition of a mysterious, metaphysical "broken-ness" in the human condition. This is more than in-tellectual reserve about accepting our limited human

judgements as anything more than provisional, though it includes this. It is a recognition of the reality of alienation as a possible human condition, which is characterized by a loss of value and orientation which appears to be global in scope, prompting despair. "I once was lost", to quote from the hymn "Amazing grace".

Western culture seems to me to be in some danger of losing sight of the distinction between the spiritual and the moral in discussions of Christianity. I understand 'spirituality' to refer in large part to the reality of our own spirit and the way in which we have been formed in our world-view, values, orientation and habits through living with others, beginning in our family of origin. Morality involves our choices and actual behaviour, and our understanding of it is likely to be shaped by our surrounding culture. Our reality includes both spirituality and morality, as they interact in shaping and exercising our values, but they should be seen as distinct areas of our reality. The classical tensions between "living by law" and "living by grace" in Christian thought are an expression of the distinction as well as of the interaction of spirituality and morality.

'Sin' as I understand it refers to our failure to receive the love of God as the basis of our spirituality. This failure has moral consequences, though it is not itself a moral failure. It is therefore to be expected that people who cannot find it in them to accept Christianity can nevertheless find a spirituality which supports them in living a morally upright, possibly even blameless, life. Christians regularly experience a withdrawal from a full and joyous reception of the love of God (God's love for us as well as our love for God), followed by a return (often hesitant and partial) to that love, and such withdrawal and limited response shows the reality of sin continuing in us even within the life of faith.

'Atonement' refers to the overcoming of the alienation of sin. It is another word that is at home in discussions of spirituality but not so much where morality provides the frame of reference. The focus of meaning is on the restoration of a broken relationship. Discussions of spirituality could well begin with an account of the spiritually active relationships that people recognize in themselves and in each other, relationships which may be frustrating and which may even be abandoned, but which offer real energy for life. As a example, encounters with nature beyond the artificialities of city life can function as a spiritually nurturing relationship for many of us. For Christians, the figure of Jesus of Nazareth is important as the primary one through whom such a relationship is offered. To say that Jesus has provided the basis for atonement for the sin of the world is to say that his way of self-giving love makes available the possibility of receiving the love of God as a free gift. Christian theologians struggle to give an account of how this works, but that it works is a central part of the substance of Christian faith.

John, you chide Christian theologians for not attending to the voices of non-Christians as cherished conversation partners. You have an important point to make when we are dealing with questions of historical truth, where allowance needs to be made for subjective orientation, as we assess evidence. I am not persuaded that your concern is justified when it is a matter of giving an account of Christian faith as such. In judging a film, it is a pre-condition for joining the conversation that one has seen the film. In articulating the content of Christian faith, those who have relevant experience of the faith have status as conversation partners. Those who no longer adhere to the faith have a special status in the conversation, partly as "critical friends" and partly as living questions concerning the validity of the faith. This dimension of the conversation can be seen as a matter of interfaith dialogue. I would agree that this is a most significant and even necessary conversation for us all. I would not agree that no acceptable theology can occur in its absence. Those who confess a faith have an authority concerning that faith which is not open to others.

Thank you again for this invitation to write. I will be open to further conversation as we are able.

Sandy Yule

30 November 2014

Learningguild's philosophy seminar turns in 2015 to the subject "Aims and Ideals". Plato, Cicero, Peter Singer and Hugh Mackay are prominent among those whose writings we expect to discuss. For more, see the relevant section of our website: the address is learningguild.org.au. We should welcome any corresponding member.

Letter to James Anthony and colleagues

(30 December 2013)

Dear James and other teachers ─ all of you students of English ─ at Holy Mother Public School, Bharatpur (eastern Rajasthan, India),

Thanks very much, James, for your letter of the 7th. You have made the excellent suggestion that (if we generalize it) a pupil preparing for an exam for which there are set texts should go from words in such texts to a dictionary that has example-sentences and then write a similar sentence of his or her own using that word, rather than look first in that dictionary for a word to choose and use. Yes, that is certainly sensible as a major way of doing the work we call SSC (Sentences to Study and Change), set out in my booklet of that name. As you say, teachers could invite pupils preparing for such exams to take many of their words for SSC from lists given at the ends of chapters of such texts.

Let me emphasize some words in a sentence in Guideline A (p.5), because they apply to anyone doing SSC: "Choosing for the box at 2 **a word whose employment you want to master**, you study its use and the whole sentence that includes it." There is no reason why teachers or students should not decide on many such words before the dictionary is opened, taking them from textbooks; and, even if one goes straight to the dictionary to see what one will find, one should be ready to react, in relation to many words explained there, with "**No**, I don't need that word enough now to do SSC with it."

I am glad too that you say that for any word taken from a text we should check the **part of speech** that it is in its particular sentence. Thus we come to understand its function there, and can then look for the same function in the dictionary's example-sentence, and give it the same function in our own sentence at 5.

Becoming able to identify the parts of speech in a particular sentence (i.e., to **parse**) is essential for understanding how words are used and combined. On p.7 of *SSC* I parse two sentences. Here I'll parse the first sentence, "I am glad …", in the previous paragraph. The first seven words are pronoun, personed verb (1S), adjective, adverb, conjunction, pronoun, personed verb (2S). (In parsing-lists, we need not use *a* or *an* before these singular nouns or noun phrases.) For 'personed verb', we can say 'PV'.

Make sure that children learning to parse know and understand Hindi names for parsing too. Notice how inaccurate and misleading it is to say, as many unwise teachers do, "Verbs are doing-words." *Am* is a verb. Why do I invite you to say 'personed verb' (the old term was 'finite verb') and not just 'verb'? Let's first define 'personed': a personed verb is one of which we can say that it is being used as a 1st-person, or as a 2nd-person, or as a 3rd-person, verb-form. In that connection, become completely familiar with these "tables-of-six" and others in *Making up Sentences* (*MS*) 1:6 (pronouns) and 1:7 (verbs):

(1st-person)	I	we	am	are	swim	swim
(2nd-person)	you	you	are	are	swim	swim
(3rd-person)	he/she/it	they	is	are	swim**s**	swim

Using S for 'singular' and P for 'plural', we can give one of six labels to each word on our tables: on the left side of each table 1S (= first person singular), 2S, 3S, and on the right 1P, 2P, 3P. Notice the great importance of recognizing, after 'he' or 'she' or 'it', or names or descriptions of third persons ('Harshita' or 'my sister'), that there you need a 3S verb-form, the one at **the bottom left** of verb-tables, which usually has **an added *s*.**

In assertions and in questions, each normal sentence **must** have at least one "**matching pair**", made up of what I call a subject-locution (Sub-L) and a PV that matches it in that it has the same label. In the matching pair 'I am' (both 1S) in the sentence being parsed, the person (not the word, but myself) that I call I is the subject, and the word *I* is the **subject-locution**, referring to me. In the matching pair 'you say', the person James Anthony is the subject, and 'you' is the subject-locution referring to him. (On 'locution' and this distinction, needed but commonly neglected by grammarians, see *MS* 1:3 & 7.1: 'matching pairs' appears at 7.14.)

Many examples should be given of PVs, some just one word and some consisting of two or more (such as 'is taking' and 'has been taken'), and their usual position after a subject-locution noted. Plenty of practice should be given in recognizing and correcting pairs that fail to match, such as 'Jack walk', where 'Jack walks' or 'Jack walked' would be correct.

In 'that for any word taken from a text', we have conjunction, preposition, adjective, noun, adjective (past participle), preposition, article, noun. A participle can be used in two ways (3:5.4): one is with one or more auxiliaries (as in the above examples with 'taking' and 'taken') to make one PV, and the other is by itself, adjectivally. Give yourselves and your pupils lots of practice in using prepositions in front of nouns, pronouns, noun phrases and noun clauses: 'from Pankaj/from him/from the boy/from what he says'. ('What he says' is called a noun clause (2:4.4): its overall role is like that of the noun phrase 'his words'.)

'We should check the part of speech': pronoun, modal PV (1P), bare infinitive verb, article, noun, preposition, noun. For modal verbs, see 3:6: all are always personed, none changes for the 3S form, and all are followed by a bare infinitive, i.e., the basic form of the verb without the particle (or "infinitive marker") *to*, which is **not** a preposition as *to* is in 'to Delhi'. (The infinitive for *am*, *are*, *is* is *be*.) Modal verbs should not be called auxiliaries. *Should* is sometimes, but not here, an auxiliary: *can*, *must*, *may* and *might* are always modal.

'That it is there': relative pronoun, pronoun, PV (3S), adverb. To distinguish the set of pronouns given at the foot of the previous page, along with the corresponding set of object-locution (Ob-L) pronouns *me*, etc., from other types of pronouns, we call those in the former sets personal pronouns, letting in *it* because its 3S function is so like that of *he* and *she*. *That* as a relative pronoun (2:4.4, 4:1.2) is like *which*, but they are not always interchangeable.

I'll add four sentences that belong not to parsing but to syntax (5:3.3) or clause-phrase analysis (6:2.2). The backbone verb (BV: 2.4) of the sentence is *am*. (All BVs are PVs, but not all PVs are BVs.) I don't use the expression 'main clause' (see 6:2.7). There is a long noun clause from the first *that* to the end; it contains another noun clause that runs from the second *that* to the end; and that clause (*that* is there an adjective!) contains a relative clause, also called an adjectival one (2:4.4), from the third *that* to the end!

My greetings and best wishes to you all. Do write to me with any questions! People outside Australia can become members of Learningguild simply by undertaking to write to us at least once a year with news and/or views and/or questions.

John Howes

Two months close to wild animals

KRIŽAN RADOS *is the elder son in a family of four, all members of Learningguild. Here he tells of a special kind of volunteering, one that he has found a great stimulus to future lines of work.*

I have had a fascination with the natural world, especially wild life, since I was a toddler. Last year I decided to save some of the money I make at the boarding kernel and cattery where I'm employed, and do some volunteer work. Travelling early this year, my destination was Karongwe National Park in South Africa. After landing at Johannesburg Airport and meeting employees of the volunteer organisation Global Vision International, and the other eighteen volunteers from around the world that I would be living with for two months, I began with them a five-hour bus drive to the reserve.

On arrival we quickly unpacked and got settled in. The reality of the remarkable place in which I would spend the next two months hit me the first night, when we volunteers were woken up by the sounds of an enormous bull elephant eating wild fruit just outside our window. Most days at Karongwe commenced at 4 a.m., when we began a drive that continued until about midday. We would have another drive from 4 p.m. till about 8. The responsibility of the staff and volunteers was to locate certain animals within the reserve and report their whereabouts for tourist game drives. We would write down the data on the animal and include its behaviour, eating patterns, and health for the day. The animals we had to locate were three lions (the dominant male was named Subzero), a female cheetah, Ketswiri, with three cubs, a large male leopard, Tsavo, and also rhinos and elephants. Certain animals were fitted with microchips and we would use a telemetry device to locate them each day.

Finding Ketswiri each day was my particular favourite because we could get out of the car and walk to where she and her cubs were. She had become accustomed to humans and would allow small groups to stand about five metres from her. Being able to be so close to a wild animal and still maintain boundaries and respect her space is something I shall never forget. She was an accomplished hunter: I saw her on four kills.

Tsavo was always the hardest to find and we could go many days without seeing him. However, when we did it was all the more gratifying. Subzero was awe-inspiring to look at. He had such power, and the three lions definitely knew their place at the top of the food chain. The most important animals we had to locate were the rhinos, because of their endangered status. No rhino had ever been poached at our reserve, but the one next to it lost five in a month while I was there. Drives were so unpredictable: we saw so many other animals, including more leopards, a huge variety of herding animals such as impala, wildebeest and zebra, and some rare animals such as honey badgers, smaller cats called servets, and many more.

Game drives were not the only activity for us volunteers. We spent a week in the mountainous area near the park doing research on small animals, amphibians and reptiles. I also jumped at the chance to do some work at a kindergarten in a local village. After drives staff members would drive us there and we would spend a few hours teaching the children simple English and painting the building. Every Saturday we had "Party Night", when the staff and volunteers would have a traditional South African barbecue, called a braai, and reflect on the week.

There were so many memorable moments. One morning we had got struck in a river. As we were trying to free the car we heard trees breaking behind us. The staff member told us to get back in the car quickly, and just as well we did: a herd of 26 elephants, including a bull and some calves, crossed the river all around us. Another day it was particularly wet outside and I foolishly decided to leave my camera at the base: as we turned the first corner out of the driveway we witnessed several hyenas chase and take down a female giraffe.

I will never forget my two months at Karongwe – not only the experiences I was so privileged to have, but also the like-minded people I met of many ages and many backgrounds from around the world. This trip, I believe, will prove to be a great step in the right direction for me and a stimulus to taking a course in making documentary films on nature. I recommend this volunteer program to anyone with a thirst for adventure and a love of the natural world.

Review

ELIZABETH HOWES, *like her sister Hilary (see p.9) a daughter of Michael and Dorothy (all members of Learningguild), is a primary teacher who has travelled extensively with her partner Ariel de Ramos. Here she reviews a novel, in fact a first novel by a woman in her eighties, who, in a style Elizabeth explains, has been a prolific writer and illustrator for children.   The novel is* **Hero on a Bicycle**, *by Shirley Hughes (Candlewick Press 2013).*

I first encountered Shirley Hughes through her picture books, which I read and loved as a child. Her stories were about children's everyday experiences in modern England, told in a tender and heart-warming way with her own lifelike illustrations, and easy to identify with. A beloved toy dog, lost, found, lost again, and regained. A three-year-old who accidentally locks himself into the house, with his mother and neighbours crowded outside, trying to help him. A young boy who spends the day feeling that his gumboots don't seem quite right, until at last he works out that they are on the wrong feet.

On my final teaching round, I saw a hint of Hughes's passionate concern for children whose everyday lives are lived in danger and uncertainty. The book *For Every Child*, published by UNICEF, featuring illustrations from fifteen artists, has a double-page painting by Hughes of a child, alone and terrified, illustrating Article 38 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: "Children should not be forced to participate in conflict. Children in war zones should receive special protection."

Hero on a Bicycle's main character, Paolo Crivelli, is a thirteen-year-old living in Italy in World War II, long before the Convention was ratified. His mother, Rosemary, is English, which means that the family is being quietly shunned by many of their neighbours and former friends. She tries to protect Paolo and his sister Constanza from too much involvement in the war, but Paolo is restless sitting at home. He wants to be part of the action, to be a "hero" like the stars in the action films that he watches. Constanza, diplomatic and carefully polite to the occupying soldiers, eventually becomes involved with a Canadian prisoner of war, Joe, which puts her at risk of execution. By the end, Paolo and Constanza have been "forced to experience things from which no one, not even [their mother], had been able to protect them". Because of this, Paolo is completely disillusioned with the idea of heroism. He has "seen enough of war to know that he

[wants] no part in it". But to his father, he is a hero anyway – an ordinary teenager, a hero on a bicycle.

The Crivellis are based on a real family that Hughes met during a visit to Florence shortly after the end of the war. Like Rosemary in the book, the English mother bravely sheltered escaped prisoners of war, at great personal risk. Wartime abounds with such stories, but this family's story was unusual, in that they were under greater suspicion already because of the mother's country of birth. It must have taken extra courage to assist the Partisans in this situation. Of course, in *Hero*, Rosemary has little choice. The Partisans are "as ruthless as the enemy". When they came to the door to convince Rosemary to help, and one spoke, "his voice was persuasive, but the rifle still pointing directly at her was more so". The Partisans are anti-Fascist, but they also cause deaths and harm: they plant mines, and steal Paolo's bicycle and beat him up when he attempts to join them.

The characters in *Hero* are all complex – there is no black and white. As Paolo observes, "it [isn't] a simple matter of the good guys and the bad guys". Helmut Grass, the German lieutenant who has a certain fondness towards Constanza, pretends not to notice a cigarette paper dropped by Joe during a search of the Crivellis' house. Hilaria Albertini, the seemingly shallow and self-interested daughter of the well-to-do Fascist-sympathising family next door to the Crivellis, warns Constanza of an impending search by the Gestapo in time for Joe to escape.

To save his son from torture, the Crivellis' loyal servant's brother tips the Nazi soldiers off about the prisoner of war, almost causing him to be caught. Costanza maintains a friendship with Hilaria, even though her family does not approve, because she knows it is important "to keep up at least a superficially good relationship with the few neighbours still willing to befriend the family".

The characters' behaviour as humans, not as simply members of one side or the other, reflects real events of the World Wars, such as the famous 1914 Christmas Day in the trenches. Even when people had been taught to fear and hate the "other side", they were capable of recognising their and others' common humanity. In the midst of all the tragedies of the war, the conflict brought out the best in many people.

Hero also explores the far-reaching consequences of conflict. Rosemary predicts that "when this war ends, it won't be a simple matter of defeat or victory. It will have spread its horrible, destructive tentacles out into all of our lives long after the so-called peace has arrived." Those who were trained to harden themselves to the brutalities of war found that their lives had been attenuated. There is a harrowing sentence in the book, describing a young Nazi soldier: "She thought she had never seen so much world-weariness in such a young face."

Then there is the absence, and eventual return, of Rosemary's husband Franco. It was unimaginably hard for the women whose husbands, sweethearts, brothers and fathers were killed during the war. But having your husband return and having to get to know him again – that too is hardship, of a different kind. *Hero* ends with the end of the war, and the reader is left to imagine how it might have affected the Crivellis' lives in the future.

Hero offers great scope for reading and guided discussion in the upper primary school and beyond. Students could be encouraged to continue the story and explore the possible after-effects of the war on the characters. They could also write an imaginative piece about how Rosemary and Franco came to meet and marry; there is no story about that in the book. They could prepare a presentation on everyday wartime life – "when not terrifying, [it] was a combination of long stretches of boredom and grinding hardship" – aided by the accompanying website, www.heroonabicycle.co.uk, on which Hughes reminisces about her own life as a teenager during World War II. Such first-hand accounts are becoming rarer, and this makes the website an invaluable resource for enquiry about that war. The website also includes contemporary music such as *La Vie en Rose* and Lili Marlene, glamorous fashion sketches by Hughes of the swagger coats and skirts of the wartime years, and sketches of Florentine men and women whom she met on her journey there.

On the website, Hughes also talks about why she wrote *Hero*. To her, she explains, the setting of the book is within living memory, but to today's teenagers, it is unimaginably long ago. Her hope is that young readers will be inspired by the book to find out more about World War II, to read more books from that time, perhaps to visit Italy and remember what the country has survived, and to work to prevent such tragedies from happening again.

As survivors of that war are becoming fewer, books such as *Hero* become more important than ever. It is these first-hand accounts that remind today's children of the horror of war, and can inspire them to be part of peacemaking instead.