



News and views from the School

Twice termly: Issue no 21



Great news: South African Mike Tsishonga now in parliament – see [Insight 7](#) for his account of standing against corruption. It's great to hear that his courage has paid off. He remains a member of the School and attends as often as his situation allows. We wish him well.

Poetry competition: There are many people who enjoy writing poetry, so why not enter a competition? The poetry competition will be hosted on the London School's poetry forum. Send in a poem on the subject of beauty, not more than 20 lines. Go to [SESPoetry](#) for more details. Closing date for submissions is September 15th 2014. Anyone may enter a poem for the competition.

Go to [Schoolinsight](#) for more articles, back issues and sign-up form. All good wishes,

Christine Lambie, editor



The Order of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary was founded in Ireland in 1775. Sisters have dedicated their time to creating schools to educate young people, especially young women. Most of these schools are still in operation and can be found all over the world. Today around 50 Presentation Sisters educate 16,000 girls in Pakistan.

Rehana is headmistress at a girls' school in Risalpur, northwest Pakistan, consisting mostly of tribal Pathan and Punjabi children. She first met the School in Dublin! She herself attends an online philosophy class.

**Philosophy in Pakistan
Rehana Mehnga, Pakistan**

I am Rehana from Pakistan. I am a Presentation Nun. I have been a nun for 25 years. I was a very enthusiastic member of the congregation and worked as a principal of 1,100 girls, both primary

and high school, in northwest Pakistan. But in 2010, a trauma changed my whole life so that I lost all my feeling for the mission I committed myself for. It involved fraud, dishonesty, threats and legal action, all of which put enormous pressure on me. I became depressed and had no desire to live; life had no meaning for me. So, as my order was founded in Ireland, in July 2011 I was sent there to get some counselling.

Ireland

So in July 2011, I went to Ireland for a year. I had nothing planned for this time; I was just trying to live moment by moment. During this time, I lived with the Presentation Sisters in Lucan. The sisters were extremely good to me. Meanwhile I visited the psychiatrist and the counsellor to get some help with the trauma I had endured.

One day sitting, turning the pages of newspaper, quite by chance, I came across an advertisement of the School of Practical Philosophy on Northumberland Road. I picked up the phone and rang the School inquiring about the classes. I had no interest in philosophy but just wanted to pass the time.

The philosophy classes helped me to live in the present moment, to let go of the hurtful past and not to worry about the future. There was great benefit from the exercises on stillness, although I found these very difficult at first. For example, I hated anyone from Pakistan who phoned me – but gradually my heart opened to receive. So it was very important for me to learn to stay in the present moment. During this time I felt the grace of God. I got so much help to see my real self once again. We don't have these opportunities in Pakistan: time to think and reflect.

Also some of my close friends in Ireland often met me and did their best so that I could come back to be myself. Thank God, by the end of the year I started feeling well and full of life; I then wanted to return to Pakistan and face the people who had hurt me.

Starting classes

Once I was back in Pakistan, I wanted other people to benefit from Practical Philosophy too. Therefore I talked to Mr Shane Mullhall, the leader of the School, if he would permit me to start Philosophy classes in Risalpur and help me. He was very generous and happy to help. And he also helped me to continue Philosophy classes online myself.

I started teaching Practical Philosophy on 11th September 2012 here in Risalpur. I have both Muslim and Christian teachers at my school; I was worried that they might not get along but I wanted to leave it free for the whole staff to come if they wanted. I showed the pamphlet about the School and 26 people put down their names. They all came and have continued attending classes till Part 4, in December 2013. There was an obvious change as the class developed. At first there were two very distinct groups – Christian and Muslim. But now they are totally accepting of each other; they sit together and share

The second group started on 15th January 2013, of 12 women, again Christian and Muslim. I have had a positive response from the school and have seen a great change in the way Muslim and Christian communities in school have accepted each other.

So I enjoy teaching and practising Practical Philosophy. I have learnt to 'calm down', to do whatever I can do. I just start with one work, whatever it is, so there is no burden on my mind of all I have to do. I get threatening letters; it is very risky for us to work in this area as terrorism is common, but I am trusting in God to look after us. We can't just sit back and close our doors.

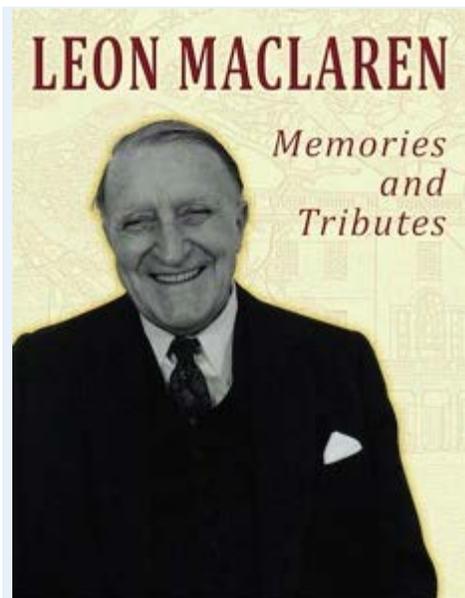
In August, I will be moving to Rawalpindi and hope to start a class there with new teachers. This school has 1,800 girls. I often pray for all the teachers of Philosophy School in Dublin who helped me to be myself once again.

New publication:

Leon MacLaren, Memories and Tributes

This collection of writings by students in the School paints a fascinating collective portrait of the founder of the School worldwide. Available on the website at SESbookshop.

In the book, one contributor writes: *'My memory of Mr MacLaren is*



not for his wise advice, although there was plenty of that, nor for his deep insight into the scriptures and philosophies of old although there was a liberal supply of that . . . No, what I remember Mr MacLaren for is something more unusual. When you were in his company you wanted to be more, not be more anything but simply to be more. . .

'It was easy to practise in his presence. It was effortless to be more yourself when with him. In short, you felt more awake. There are other aspects: life was more of a play when lived like this. It was more interesting and more entertaining. You came away refreshed. The world seemed brighter and you felt brighter too.'



Mathieu is a professional baker, now retired, and a senior student in the School in Belgium. His skills have enhanced the residential courses of countless students! He has also been a key figure in the Belgian Waffle Tent at Art in Action, the arts festival hosted by the School in London. He tells something of his life's journey.

From Baking to Philosophy **Mathieu Born, Belgium**

It is funny, you live your life and things happen and have a certain impact, good or bad, and when, in a quiet moment, you try to make a summary of your life, it seems if it is all fragments and when you bring them together we call it: my life.

Childhood in the war

Being the son of a carpenter who worked at the railroad, (at the time when there were still wooden wagons), I was five years old when the war started. There was not an abundance of material things. My parents always managed to feed my sister and myself, but I am sure that it was not always the case for them! I remember my father told me once that he had to go to work for a whole winter (1942) with only some carrots as food.

One day after the war, my father said, 'Butchers, bakers and farmers don't go hungry'. Having been witness in the war to the lack of food, this statement made a decisive impression and so I started as an apprentice baker. I attained a diploma as a baker just before I had to go to the army for 18 months, (at that time there was still compulsory military service in Belgium) and I stayed for 15 months in Germany, near Cologne.

Career in baking

After my service in the army I worked as a baker in Brussels and there I met my wife. She worked as a

nurse near Brussels. Both far from our birthplace, we soon decided to marry and then everything went very fast: a personal business, four children, ... But at a certain moment we were forced to stand still, when we lost our oldest child, a girl, in a car accident. She was nearly 3 years old. These were sorrowful times but I have to say that being very occupied with the business did help us to bear that loss. Later we had three more children and now six grandchildren, who are all very good students, three at the university, and that makes my wife and myself very proud.

Establishing the bakery

Beside my diploma, I followed courses in different specialties in the branch for four years. First we rented a shop in Brussels for 10 years and then we were able to buy an old bakery shop in a busy street. We modernized that building thanks to a project from the government that enabled us to have a loan without warranty. We worked there together with five employees, three in the bakery, one in the shop and one in the household. It was hard work; we started mostly the evening before, working for 12-14 hours to be ready for deliveries and to open the shop. I can say that I was very competent in bread baking, patisserie, chocolate, ice cream and even light catering work, and it earned well!

Learning

After some years going to classes with the whole family, I became hungry for real knowledge and went to the Brussels school for Practical Philosophy, mostly because in their announcement they said that it was NOT a course where you could gain a diploma!

Even when I was happy with my wife, children and later grandchildren and the business and so on, I was overpowered by the feeling that I was inferior as an individual. That inferiority complex fully disappeared with the real knowledge given by the School. Position, degree and affluence are all movements, sometimes needed in the world, but they should always be under control.

Most important to me is to remember the eternal stillness. I find deep stillness always and only in the present moment; all knowledge, consciousness and happiness is there for everyone. For me going to the School is a step towards wisdom and truth that I have to make in every moment, the present moment, and that step lasts the whole week. And I know that it will last my whole life here on earth. It is as one step from birth till the moment of earthly death.

And to end, a spiritual note from two individuals who experienced unity in a very simple way. My wife and myself had a little walk with the dog this evening, and at a certain moment I said to my wife that I loved her, and she replied with, 'I love you too' and then she said, 'We repeat this for almost 60 years and it seems as if there was no interruption between the first time we said it and now'. I heard myself saying: 'That is because it was the present moment then, now and all the time in between'. The very best of the best to everyone!

Lily is the labrador puppy who lives with Donald Lambie, the leader of the School and his wife, the editor. Many people asked for more from Lily, so here she is again.

Letter from Lily

Ok so this poster is circulating the London Metropolitan Police and Interpol. Here's my statement: It was a warm sunny evening in June. I was out in Hyde Park exploring, when I saw a nice couple in the distance. Obviously I went over to say hello, as I'm a well-mannered puppy. I knew they were nice because they had a picnic. On the ground. So what's a puppy supposed to do? At this point I'd like to discuss my green credentials and say that I'm a natural recycler. I recycled that picnic faster than you can say 'poached salmon'. For that is indeed what I had. You'd



think a crime had been committed. It was fun to watch my owners at that point too. While savouring the poached salmon.

Don't take life too seriously - that's my advice. Think about it for a while. Then have dinner and play with a ball.

Love from Lily.



Spiritual Sites

The Karoo Desert, South Africa

Edward Thomlinson writes about the desert situated between Johannesburg and Cape Town. He has taken many trips in the Karoo, hiking, mountain biking, climbing, and observing wildlife. Its space and silence have touched him deeply.

Hundreds of million of years ago, when Gondwanaland broke away from Pangaea and formed the African continent, a vast inland sea arose in what was to become South Africa. This sea eventually became an arid desert, the Karoo, meaning, 'The Land of Thirst' named by the original inhabitants, Khoi-San, popularly referred to as Bushmen. The estimated area of the Karoo is 395,000 sq. kms. (The area of UK is 244,000 sq km.)

Unlike traditional deserts, the Karoo is not what one would expect in terms of vast stretches of sand and dunes. It contains some 50 towns which have their own characteristics, populations and history. The Karoo with its breath-taking vistas of mountains, valleys and plains, its sunsets and sunrises, provides the ideal opportunity for meditation, contemplation, reflection, study and other spiritual activities.

Together with some parts of Australia the rocks are considered to be the oldest on earth. The experience arising from being in their company certainly confirms the claims that we are mere sojourners on the face of

the earth! Most profound of all is the opportunity for silence, and lack of activity in the wide open spaces. For me, it was usually the opportunity to top up the spiritual batteries!

Once, early one morning, on a trail in the Karoo National Park it was possible to view both the sun as it arose and Venus, apparently in close proximity one to the other. This, for me, emphasised the relationship of the individual to the universal; the moment was profoundly moving.

In 1965 I was travelling to Cape Town by car with my wife and three children to collect my parents who were arriving by ship. The car broke down late at night, far from any help in the middle of the Karoo. The Ikeya-Seki comet, the brightest comet of the 20th century was directly overhead and the wonder of it gave little opportunity for sleep even though we were warmly ensconced in our sleeping bags. The physical body became an integral part of a continuum wherein the source of light, the recipient, and the ground were all One. It may well have been my introduction to Advaita! It seemed true that, 'You can reach out and touch the stars!' The next morning the car started, first touch, and we drove to Kimberley where the problem was quickly diagnosed, sorted out and we were back on our way!

From these experiences, it is the profundity of the silence which clarifies the scriptures: 'Be still; and know that I am God!' and from Shri Shantananda Saraswati: 'Stillness is the Self!' If certain locations and ambience are necessary factors for these revelations, then the Karoo will certainly meet the need!

Reader Feedback



*I really really enjoy reading these newsletters and look forward to each issue. I have recently moved to Spain, to rural Andalucia, at least 5 hours from the Madrid school, and am missing group meetings. I have belonged to various branches of the school over the years, most recently to the Reading school. I love hearing the personal stories of people in the school or connected to the school, it's a kind of "distant" group meeting. I hear there is an online course run by the New York school, which I must investigate now that I have (just) got connected to the internet. I loved reading Martin's story in this issue, and found it very inspiring, gives me courage to make tough decisions in my own life. I haven't really got any suggestions, just keep up the good work! **Madrid***

Thanks for reading

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Please keep that feedback coming. I need all your suggestions of personal stories, insights, links, articles, cartoons, video clips – anything that will be of interest to our philosophy community. Do you know someone in the School who has an interesting story to tell? E-mail me at: editor@seslondon.org. Thanks again for reading, CL

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