



May 2025

SUIHAA Newsletter

A Message from the SUIHAA Committee Executive

Welcome to the May 2025 SUIHAA Newsletter. As usual, there is an abundance of news to convey. We continue to have a Table of Contents, so you can start with the articles that most interest you.

No matter where you start in the Newsletter, you won't want to miss:

- Save-the-Date of Thursday, 21 August, for the 2025 de Graaff-Elms Roundtable.
- The successful inaugural meeting of the SUIHAA Book Club. Happy to have more alumni join.
- Photos from the runners-up of the Rosemary Berrick Photography Competition.
- The latest regarding the redevelopment of IH, including article and editorial about IH in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.
- Reminiscences and photos from the IH alumni reunion in March.
- How to access the new SUIHAA YouTube Channel.

*Message from
the SUIHAA
Executive*

As always, we want to thank the other members of the SUIHAA Committee, who keep the IH vision and mission alive, and organize the different SUIHAA-supported events:

Ian Gutierrez
Anne Gotsis
Michael Hirschhorn
Josh Lee
Margaret Lemoh
Ros Madden
Taz Rahman
Liz Wong

Enjoy the various articles in this issue of the SUIHAA Newsletter!

On behalf of the SUIHAA Committee,

Dennis Schatz (*SUIHAA President*)
Louise Trott (*SUIHAA Secretary*)
Rod Thyer (*SUIHAA Treasurer*)

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29 March: IH alumni reunion in Chippendale

Taz Rahman and Dennis Schatz

Reflections from Dennis Schatz

It was a rainy, dreary day, but the IH alumni reunion provided a bright spot for the many alumni who were undercover in the outdoor garden area at The Duck Inn, Chippendale.



The reunion crowd enjoy friendship, food and drink – photo thanks to Josh Lee

SUIHAA reunion in Chippendale

My wife and I were delighted to be in Sydney for the event. It was a great time catching up with people who were at IH when I was, people I have met through SUIHAA and some alumni I have not met before. I am excited that we will continue these annual reunions, probably moving to September when many people are in town for Sydney University events.

Every reunion I attend reminds me of how lifechanging my experience at IH was. As a person who had never been out of my home country (United States), it brought me in contact with people from so many cultures. My stay at IH expanded my worldview, and left an imprint in the way I interact with all people by making me realize how important it is to understand every individual's personal and cultural characteristics. I hope more of you will be able to attend future reunions.



*In front; Karl and Lan Wehrhan, Gwen Ng, Josh Lee
Barely visible in the back: Rod Thyer and Margaret Lemoh
Photo thanks to Ros Madden*

Reflections from Taz Rahman

This was my second reunion and I was more excited than nervous beforehand compared to last year. I had such a lovely time at my first reunion that I contributed to organising and putting the word out about the reunion with the University's alumni office this year. Last year, I met many committee members for the first time, and this year I was also particularly happy to finally meet our committee president, Dennis, in-person after only chatting on committee Zoom calls.

SUIHAA reunion in Chippendale

We shared with the other alumni our efforts to get the ball rolling faster on the new IH getting built and the discussions with some of USyd's leadership. It was also good to catch up with Margaret, Ros, and Josh and share with fellow alumni the progress in organising the Biennial De Graff-Elms Roundtable for later this year.

It was great to meet fellow past residents who were interested in joining the committee and have motivating discussions on how to extend the reach of SUIHAA.

The friends I made at International House are like a family to me, and I look forward to making more memories at reunions, learning from their events, and staying engaged with SUIHAA.



Dennis Schatz, Taz Rahman and Josh Lee – photo thanks to Ros Madden

P.S. For many IH alumni, a favourite “watering hole” was The Rose Hotel. It is now up for sale: <https://tinyurl.com/mwezwcwv>

Save the Date: 2025 de Graaff-Elms Roundtable (21August)

Taz Rahman, Ros Madden, Margaret Lemoh and Josh Lee

The de Graaff-Elms Roundtable is a biennial forum organised by the Sydney University International House Alumni Association (SUIHAA) to provide insight into important social issues. It is open to anyone interested in the topics and provides an opportunity to hear from a panel of experts, raise questions and discuss aspects of the topic.

de Graaff-Elms Roundtable

This year the Roundtable will focus on a topic that is close to the heart of SUIHAA, but also of great significance to cities that attract large numbers of students, both Australian and international:

Student accommodation and the role of universities in meeting their residential needs

Our expert panel will share their views on the problems facing the housing market in general in Australian cities, and in particular how students (local and international) navigate this landscape. We will hear about the lived experience and needs of international students and the perspective of one university, plus discuss the essential value of a living

environment which allows students to make the most of their time at university. Ideally, that environment will foster friendship and understanding between Australian and international students and help them to form connections that influence their outlook and future career.

When: 5.00pm - 7.00pm, Thursday 21st August 2021

Where: Virtually or in person at F23 Michael Spence building, Auditorium 1 (Spence building is located on the left just inside the main campus entrance at City Road and Butlin Ave). **Register below to get future information about how to participate in person or virtually.**

5.00pm to 5.30 pm – Drinks (non-alcoholic) and light refreshments available

5.30pm to 7.00 pm – Formal Roundtable discussion

7.00pm to 8.00 pm – Informal conversations with panel members and other attendees

Registration required to participate in person or virtually at: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1ho07Q6o5fLl95idRCTjPA_gBCWTGaLZeSpwKCGNeOTE/

Accessing the 8 March Walter Westman Lecture

Ian Gutierrez

Walter Westman Lecture recording

The 2025 Walter Westman lecture was held on 8 March 2025. Participants from Asia, Australia and North America listened to Randall Antonio lead a discussion on “A Balanced Examination of Electric Vehicles.” Randall spoke about the end to end environmental impact of electric vehicles from manufacturing to purchase and use and the infrastructure needed to encourage their adoption. The interactive approach encouraged a healthy discussion on the topic. This year’s lecture received positive feedback highlighting how informative, comprehensive and succinct the talk was. SUIHAA would like to thank Randall Antonio for his generosity.

The link to the recording is found below.



SUIHAA
(SYDNEY UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL HOUSE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION)
PRESENTS



2025 Walter Westman Lecture

“A Balanced Examination of Electric Vehicles”



**2025 Walter Westman Lecturer
Randall Antonio**

[A balanced look into the Environmental
Impact of Electric Vehicles - Walter
Westman Lecture 2025
youtu.be](#)

Report from the inaugural meeting of the SUIHAA Book Club

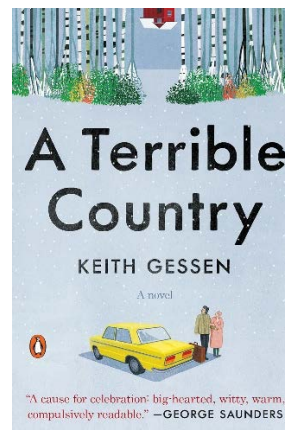
Elisabeth Wong

On 26 April, we met for our first book discussion. We hope a few more people will want to join us – see contact information at the end of the article.

At our gathering, we were conscious of Birutė Don's absence. In the two weeks before she died, Birutė made suggestions for books to read and pointed us towards useful resources. We shall miss her energy. Vale Birutė.

Our first book for discussion was *A Terrible Country* by Keith Gessen.

*SUIHAA Book
Club*

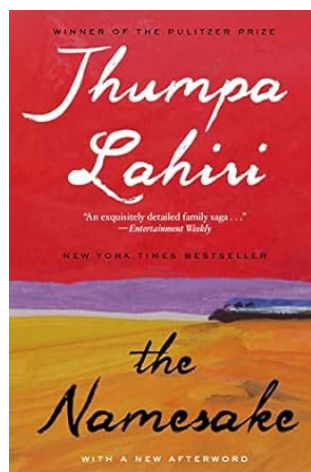


With candour, wit and compassion, the novel tells of Andrei Kaplan, a Russian-born American who, in 2008, at the age of 33, returns to Moscow to look after his grandmother, Baba Seva. She has dementia. Andrei has a much older brother, Dimitri, a businessman who left the US quite some years ago to develop a business in Moscow. He has kept an eye on Baba Seva. Now Dimitri must leave the country – he's got the oligarchs offside. So, enter Andrei. From this starting point many riches flow – some very funny, many very illuminating.

Marcel Theroux, critic for *The Guardian* said of the novel in his 2018 review:

“If the last two bizarre years have taught us anything, it’s that Russia is never irrelevant. I wonder how many more drugged spies, bent elections and political murders it will take for the rest of the world to realise, that, for existential reasons, it would be smart for us to pay it a little more consistent and nuanced attention. *A Terrible Country* would be an excellent and entertaining place to begin.”

At our next zoom meeting on Saturday, 5 July at 10am (AEST) we’ll be discussing *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri’s



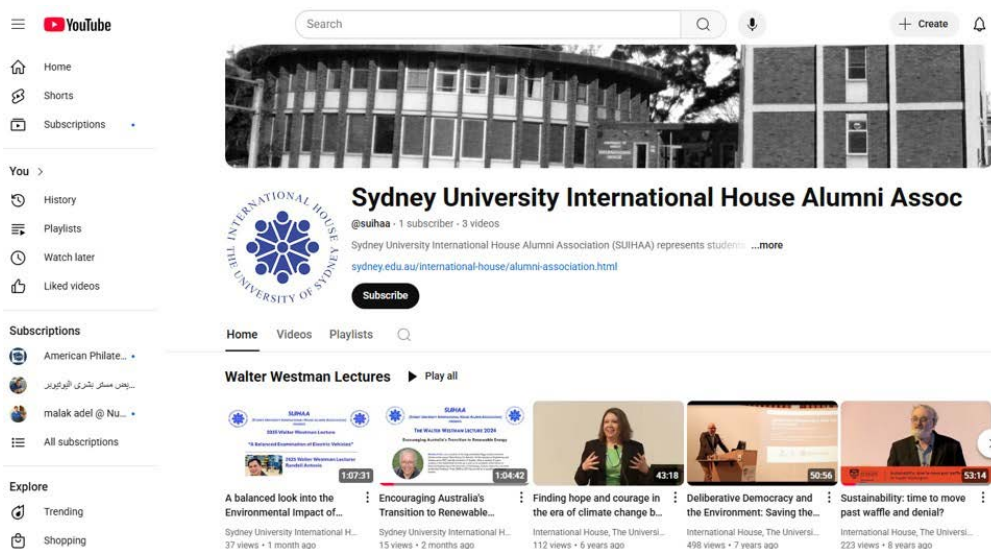
If you’d like to join the SUIHAA Book Club, please contact me (Liz Wong: wongoonoo@hotmail.com)

SUIHAA’s own YouTube Channel

Thanks to SUIHAA Committee member Josh Lee, SUIHAA now has its own YouTube Channel where you can see past Walter Westman Lectures and de Graaff-Elms Roundtables.

SUIHAA

YouTube channel



Find the YouTube Channel at <https://www.youtube.com/@suihaa>, or you can link to it from SUIHAA's webpage at <https://www.sydney.edu.au/international-house/alumni-association.html>.

Three runners-up award winners from the 2024 Rosemary Berrick Photography Competition

Dennis Schatz

The judges had 70 photos from 27 submitters to review this year, an excellent increase from last year. As occurred last year, the judges were challenged to settle on the two runners-up. It was finally decided to give three runner-up awards – see their photos below. Also like last year, the judges found other photos that deserved recognition. We will share some of these in Newsletters later this year.

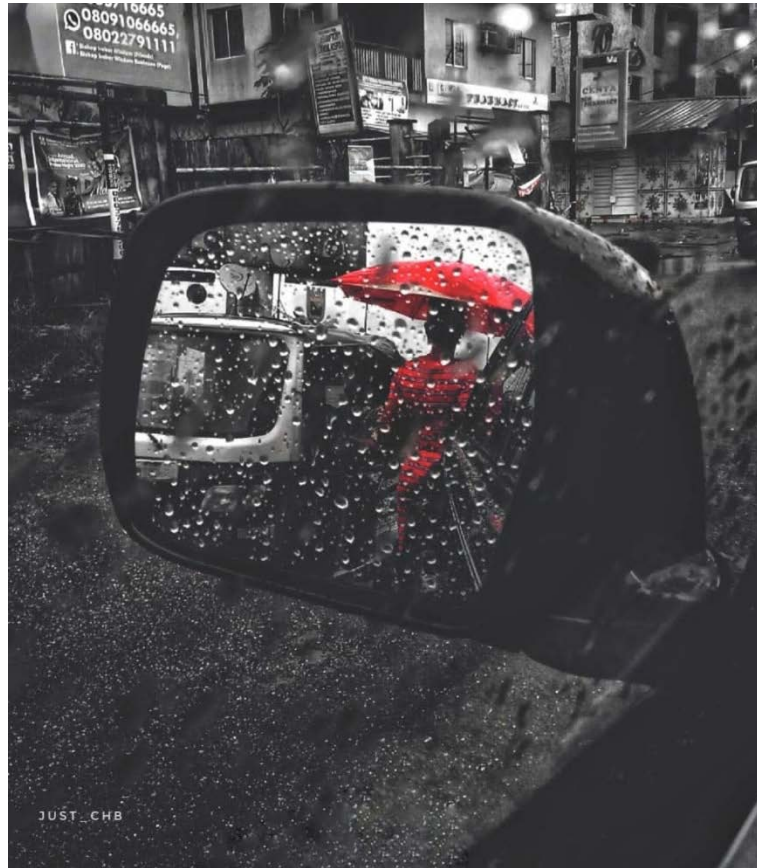
Olive Ajokpeoghene lived in IH for 3½ months in 2019 to study Medical Physics. He currently works as a remote volunteer for Watchtower, Nigeria Branch. Together with his teammates, he assists in translating materials and videos from English to Urhobo and Nigerian Pidgin. He also works as a regular “pioneer”, discussing with anyone who is interested (free of charge) how the Bible can make peoples’ lives better now, as well as what it says about the future. He also runs a modest poultry farm. He lives in Agbarho, a small town in Ughelli City, Delta State, Nigeria.

**2024 Rosemary
Berrick Photo
Competition
Runners-Up**



Olive with his wife and mum

Photo: Janus (sometime in 2020 in Warri, Delta State, Nigeria)



*2024 Rosemary
Berrick Photo
Competition
Runners-Up*

It was raining and I just arrived at my destination. I took the shot while waiting for the rain to calm down a little. Janus brings to mind this saying: “To foresee the future, you have to understand the past.” Although humanity has done and continues to do its best in this aspect, there will always be blindspots as highlighted by the photo. To figure out these blindspots, we must look to a higher power, in this case, the Cameraman.

Olive is happy to be contacted at oliveajokpeoghene@gmail.com.

Stephen Sanders lived in IH from 2016 to 2019 when he studied for a Bachelor of Advanced Science. In the few years since leaving International House, he worked in promotional marketing before moving to administration at Greenpeace Australia Pacific. He will be temporarily moving to Europe and working online, but now lives in Sydney, Australia - and travels to other places frequently!



Photo: An Aussie Sunrise (22 July 2022)

*2024 Rosemary
Berrick Photo
Competition
Runners-Up*



This photo was taken at Cape Hillsborough, QLD, Australia early one morning during sunrise. I was travelling the east coast in a campervan for two weeks, and couldn't resist stopping at a place where I had heard kangaroos frequently come down to the beach. Clearly it was well worth it, and I spent a wonderful few days there.

Stephen is happy to be contacted at stephensanders777@gmail.com

Mark Klemens lived in IH in 1979 and 1980 while he studied Australian literature. After being a lawyer for many years, he now teaches 7th and 8th graders in public school. He lives in Jacksonville, Florida, USA.



Photo: Officer and Camel (22 June 2024 in Giza, Egypt)



*2024 Rosemary
Berrick Photo
Competition
Runners-Up*

My wife and I were in Egypt to attend a wedding. We spent a day in Giza visiting the pyramids and I walked past this camel who had a very quizzical expression.

Mark is happy to be contacted at mklemens2@gmail.com.

Deadline for submitting photos to the 2025 Rosemary Berrick Photography Competition

It is that time of year again. Time for you to look through your photos and submit them to the 2025 Rosemary Berrick Photography Competition. Last year's Competition was a great success, with many more submissions than the year before. We look forward to your submissions this year.

See information below for the 2025 competition rules and prizes. The best of the photos will be featured in future SUIHAA Newsletters. The submission deadline is **25 August 2025**. The winners will be announced by October. We look forward to seeing your photos!

**2025 Rosemary
Berrick Photo
Competition
deadline**

Win \$\$\$\$ for Your Photos

**Enter the 2025 Rosemary Berrick
Photography Competition for
Sydney International House Alumni**
(organised by SUIHAA)

\$100 for each of 2 winning entries
\$50 for each of 2 runners up

**Winning photographs
will be used in next year's
SUIHAA newsletters**

Competition Rules

1. Each photograph must have a title and the location (including country) where the photograph was taken
2. There is a limit of three entries per person
3. Photos must include name, nationality and email address of entrant
4. Photographs must be between **1 and 5 MB** submitted in jpg format via email to dschatz@pacsci.org.

Competition Deadline is 25 August 2025
Results Announced by late October



SYDNEY INTERNATIONAL HOUSE
THE UNIVERSITY OF AUSTRALIA



2024 Award Winner
Into the Wild



2024 Award Winner
Janus

Bo Children's Hospital Update

Margaret Lemoh

First of all, I would like to thank you for your ongoing interest in and support of this hospital. Your donations have enabled it to continue providing quality care for children in a country of great need and few medical facilities. We are proud that the hospital is now in its 13th year of operation. Our vision is to continue and expand our services to the community.



Providing Quality Care

*Bo Children's
Hospital update*

Following an audit last year, it was decided to overhaul the administration of the Hospital. Since it opened in 2012 offering simple outpatient clinic services and vaccinations, it has grown to offering a range of services. The laboratory for example is now a well-equipped, efficient facility producing reliable results for the clinicians in their management of patients. With a trained pharmacist managing the pharmacy, quality medications are provided for patients and increasingly for customers from the surrounding community. Our outgoing medical superintendent undertook some surgical training and has helped provide much needed surgical services, such as umbilical and inguinal hernia operations.

A new, highly experienced accountant has been engaged to coordinate and streamline financial procedures. Mr. Frederick Amara took over on 1 May and comes with an impressive record of work for the Ministry of Health, World Vision, Handicap International, the Nixon Memorial Hospital in Sierra Leone (Methodist Church) and Catholic Relief Services.

We are pleased announce the appointment of Mr. Bangura to the position of Medical Superintendent. Mr. Bangura is a senior CHO with considerable experience working with children. We thank our previous Superintendent, Mr. Francis Bangalie, for his years of service. He has been a hardworking, committed, and highly respected clinician since the opening of the Hospital. Mr. Bangalie has been transferred to another hospital by the Ministry of Health, and we wish him well in his new position.

It has become apparent that the hospital needs additional buildings. The 17-bed ward is regularly at maximum capacity, and new beds for acute admissions would enable the expansion of in-patient services.

Malnutrition is a serious problem in Sierra Leone and we would like to be more proactive in its prevention as well as its treatment. The hospital already treats malnourished children, but could improve outcomes by educating parents about nutrition. While malnutrition is partly a result of poverty, teaching parents and children about fundamental principles of diet will help them to make better use of available food sources.

Looking forward, we have three main aims for the immediate future:

Expansion of outreach team activity: increasing the number of outreach clinics initiated at the end of 2024 by sending a mobile medical team from BCH to outlying villages in the Bo area at regular intervals. This often involves singing the local language to get the message across, as you can see in the video found at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1RFd2uVUYfRx7ptNytM9SI5swjeSfYZr/view?usp=sharing>

Adding to existing infrastructure and education services: our second goal is to build more wards and increase the number of beds. This would allow for expansion of the general ward so more cases can be treated. We would also like to add a special malnutrition ward to treat acute cases. Support and education services for families would also be provided. On-site accomodation for short-term visiting health care professionals would be a major asset to the functioning of the hospital.

*Bo Children's
Hospital update*



Need to Increase the Number of Beds to Meet Demand

Professional development for staff and international exchange: we want to provide more professional development opportunities for staff through local and international exchange. This can be achieved by encouraging and facilitating visits from international/local medical students and other health professionals. Mutually beneficial exchange programs could include both local and international training opportunities. Liaisons with international institutions such as schools of tropical or pediatric medicine are potential sources to explore. Providing short-term accommodation onsite at the hospital for the duration of exchange would be important.

To learn more about the hospital and how you can help, please go to our website at www.bochildrenshospital.org.au. If you wish to donate you can follow the links there and contribute via Paypal or the Rotary Australia Overseas Fund.

IH Redevelopment

Dennis Schatz and Taz Rahman

Dennis Schatz (SUIHAA President) and Taz Rahman (SUIHAA Committee Member) met in late March with three Sydney University leaders associated with IH redevelopment to explore ways SUIHAA can help expedite the reopening of IH and how it can be of assistance to international students until the reopening. The three University leaders were:

IH

redevelopment

update

Nicole Gower (Vice President for Operations)
Greg Robinson (Chief Infrastructure Officer)
Peter Scott (IH Council Member)

The meeting allowed us to reiterate the recommendations from SUIHAA regarding the nature of a successful international house, including:

- The importance of a central food service and shared dining space
- The need for appropriate program space to hold community building events, such as food festivals, cabaret nights, and the candlelight dinner
- Ways that IH can provide services and programs for international students who are not residents of IH

We were encouraged to hear from Nicole and Greg that the university plans to increase its attention to the redevelopment of IH. The details of this increased activity were not provided, other than the Project Control Group that oversees the redevelopment will be meeting more often and plans should be available soon regarding the redevelopment. We

expressed our delight regarding this planned progress and offered SUIHAA's assistance in any way that would be helpful. Taz was identified as the most appropriate person who could be of assistance. Dennis will also stay involved in the process as a member of IH Council. The IH Council met in early May and was provided with the same information. Everyone on the Council looks forward to getting more details regarding the redevelopment of IH.

The urgency of opening IH as soon as possible was the topic of a recent Sydney Morning Herald article and editorial. You can find them at:

Article – <https://tinyurl.com/bp9mzk5n>

Editorial - <https://tinyurl.com/57vr725v>

The editorial was also featured in the Melbourne newspaper, *The Age*, and the article was featured in the *Brisbane Times*.

Hopefully, these items will add additional incentive for the University to quickly redevelop IH.

Alumni Highlight: Elisabeth (Liz) Wong

Elisabeth Wong

It's 1967. In Australia, the federal referendum has been held, with 90.77% voting "Yes". This has been Australia's first step in recognising the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and, also, the inequities and injustices they have suffered for so long. The civil-disobedience phase of the Australian anti-Vietnam-War movement has begun, and draft resisters are refusing call-up notices and medicals. And in 1967, after many years of planning, International House (IH) has opened under the leadership of Graeme de Graaff, Director, and Rosalie McCutcheon, Assistant Director.

I was one of those 1967 residents. My two years there changed my life. I have discussed this with friends whom I still have from 1967 and 1968. We all remember the sense of community there, and the feeling of belonging to a very big family - but even better, a multi-cultural family. In a very relaxed way, we learnt so much about the wider world through living with people from most parts of the wider world. We felt we were living the IH motto: "That brotherhood may prevail". And we had such fun.

*Alumni
highlight: Liz
Wong*



“Studying for finals”

Front row : Tim Moulton, Craig Collie, Ric Imperial, Samy Abed, Geoff Brand.
Middle row: Malik Abdul Rahim, Liz Wong, Brian Farmer, Margaret Rugless,
John Staunton. Back row: Alex Jacob, Eunice Chia, Helen Nair

Alumni
highlight: Liz
Wong



“It’s damp underneath, up here at Blackheath”

Miriam Gottlieb, Vaughan Pratt, Dennis Geyer, Melanie Foxcroft, Helen Bryant,
Les Parcell, Liz Wong, Eunice Chia (after a hike through the Blue Gum Valley)



"Nothing to see here."

Roger Wescombe, John Diment, John Powles, Mark Foong

Alumni
highlight: Liz
Wong



"Waiting for Mr Bingley at the IH Ball"

Liz Wong, Eunice Chia, Obchant Na-Thalang, Anne MacCarthy

Interestingly, our memories of these happy and adventurous times are almost identical to the memories of other students, even those who were residents more than fifty years later. The life and traditions of IH have survived and flourished. The culture and traditions of IH are even more critical today, in a world where "brotherhood" is looking pretty shaky; and universities, buckling under managerialism and the market, struggle to maintain a sense of community.

One of my stand-out memories was devising and producing the 1968 IH cabaret, along with Richard Waterhouse and Craig Collie. It was a sprawling, kaleidoscopic event: Nuli Lemoh, in traditional dress and looking 'every inch a king', played the African drums. (Nuli, with his wife, Margaret, inspired us all to work for the creation of the Bo Children's Hospital in Sierra Leone). Lauris Elms, Principal with Opera Australia, sang Gluck's "Have I lost thee Eurydice?"

accompanied on the piano by Graeme de Graaff. Badan Deol chanted and sang his Sikh ragas; the IH choristers carolled the IH Fire Regulations which we had set to the music of a Gregorian chant. A group played beautiful chamber music, and more items followed.

Lauris Elms ended the evening with a stirring rendition of "Land of Hope and Glory" - a tilt at colonialism (the Empire was diminishing by the day), and a cheeky nod to the London Proms.



"Operatic Megastar, Lauris Elms with Three Chairs de Graaff tickling the Ivories"

Alumni
highlight: Liz
Wong

Probably, the centrepiece of the cabaret was "Hamlet – The Musical". (With just a few slight textual adaptations, Hamlet's famous soliloquy, "To be or not to be..." fits perfectly to the tune of Mozart's "La donna è mobile").



"Something is rotten in the kingdom of Chippendale"

Back row: Ric Imperial, Dennis Golding, Richard Waterhouse, Chris Gethin, Julie Garnsey

Front row: Chorus – Kay Pearse, Miriam Gottlieb, Liz Wong, Val Hazelwood.
Pianist, Adele Swain

Ric Imperial was in the lead role; some might say he embodied the cool introspection and brooding masculinity of Shakespeare's great tragic heroes. Julie Garnsey was a winsome, willowy Ophelia. Chris Gethin, as the murderous Claudius, cast a malevolent shadow over the stage. Richard Waterhouse as the ghost, was a persistent and mournful presence, trapped between this world and the next. Dennis Golding as Laertes, Ophelia's grief-stricken brother, inspired dread and terror as he finally dispatched Hamlet. Craig Collie did solid work as the guard patrolling the ramparts of Elsinore. Adele Swain was our very patient pianist. Some might have said "Hamlet – The Musical" was "a performance for the ages". Others might not.

Alumni
highlight: Liz
Wong

The fire regulations were taken extremely seriously at IH. To balance the 'gravitas' of the Fire Regulations' cabaret rendition, we decided a few props would add drama and colour. So, Ophelia (Julie Garnsey/Blakemore) and I strolled up to Newtown Fire Station. We explained to the firemen there, that the IH Fire Regulations were to be presented in choral form at the IH Cabaret; we asked if we could borrow a fireman's helmet overnight for one of our choristers. The firemen on duty were enthusiastic and suggested we take a whole uniform. We did. As we were walking out the door, one of them said: "Phone us five minutes before you go on stage and if we're not busy we'll come down and do a recce of your dining room."



"Fire regulations are sacrosanct (an incendiary performance at the IH Cabaret)"
IH Choristers: Brian Conroy, Alison Dandie, Libby Hetherington, Chris Gethin

So, phone them we did. The choristers launched into their performance to the blare of approaching sirens. Svelte, Chorister Gethin, in his fireman's jacket was sartorially splendid from the thighs up. He had to abandon the fireman's trousers because they simply fell off him, but, thankfully, only during rehearsal, not during the performance. There was some alarm amongst the audience when five large firemen entered the dining room dragging a huge fire hose. Poker-faced and focused, they snaked in and out and around the tables as the choir sang; then they exited. Their choreography was precise and elegant.

The final dying notes of the chant were accompanied by the sound of distant sirens. I don't think that could happen today.

At the end of 1967, I'd been offered two cadetships – one with the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Commission) and one with the Commonwealth Office of Education. Both were attractive; but the first year of the Education cadetship was a Dip. Ed. (Master of Teaching) and that meant I'd be at university and could stay another year at IH. So I took it and thus spent 1968 at IH.

During my Dip.Ed. year, I found that I really enjoyed classroom teaching; so at the end of 68 I abandoned my cadetship with the Commonwealth Office of Education and was fortunate to get a job in, what was then, a very progressive boys' school, with an outstanding and fun-loving English department. There I received superb mentoring, and that experience has influenced my attitudes and approaches to teaching and education ever since.

At the end of 1970 Percy Wong (IH resident, 1968-69) and I married and went to ANU Canberra where Percy was to complete his PhD in Plant Pathology. In our early years together, we moved around quite a lot. That meant I had to take whatever job was on offer, wherever we were. The advantage of that was that I had a great variety of educational experiences.

While we were living in Tamworth in North-Western NSW, four Laotian refugee families, all with very young children, arrived from Laos, via Thailand and then via a boat to Australia. It was 1978, a time when Australia was more welcoming to refugees. They were sent to Tamworth under the Rural Refugee Resettlement Scheme. The Laotians spoke no English; at the time, I was the only qualified English as Second Language teacher in town. I was asked to teach them English through the then flourishing TAFE (Technical and Further Education) Adult Literacy Program I had the greatest admiration for these families who were so courageous and ingenious, never complained, and survived happily on so little. Percy and I are still in touch with some of them. From then on, I maintained an interest in refugees and, over the years, gradually moved into Student Welfare.

In 2001, with others, I was a founding member of the Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group. The group was formed in response to the then Government's *Children Overboard Affair** and the *Tampa Affair**. The group provides support and advocacy for refugees. At one point we had 600 paid-up members. The group is still very active. There will always be refugees.

In 2004, my colleagues and I at the South-Western Sydney Office of the Dept of Education had thought that it would be very beneficial for Education students to gain direct experience of working with refugee students before they went into schools. At the time, Australians' attitudes towards refugees were frequently negative. So we devised a tutoring/mentoring program for refugee students that could be conducted by Master of Teaching students doing their final teaching placement. The University of Western Sydney was interested, and a number of their final year teaching students were eager to participate. We gave the students an initial two days' training and supervised them during their

Alumni
highlight: Liz
Wong

placement, which was at Holroyd High School at Greystanes in Western Sydney. Holroyd High, under Principal Dorothy Hoddinott, has been a trailblazer in refugee education and has always attracted many refugee students. This teaching placement was as valuable for the trainee teachers as it was for the refugees. The teachers met refugees face to face and heard from them what it was to be a refugee. They saw at first hand the learning and social challenges that confronted these children and the strategies that worked best for them. The refugee students had that critical one on one attention with someone who was eager and trained to identify their individual needs, and to provide the appropriate support. Both tutors and refugee students learnt much and felt valued.

A few years later, Western Sydney University, in partnership with the NSW Department of Education rolled out the program in some schools. It now operates as a three-way partnership between The Australian Literacy Foundation, the NSW Department of Education and participating universities.

Alumni
highlight: Liz
Wong

Subsequently, I trained as a mediator and, up until 2021, conducted mediations for the NSW Dept of Education. These particular mediations occur before or after court action by the Dept of Education against parents, whose children have not been attending school enough. At the mediations, all parties – parents, students, the school and any other participants- have an equal voice and are heard; thus, much can be achieved.

Over the years I've had the opportunity to work in every school education system in NSW and the ACT – State, Independent, Catholic, Juvenile Justice, and also in TAFE. I can say, with absolute certainty, that the education system in Australia was far more equitable in the 1970s and 1980s than it is now. When all our public schools are, once again, fully and fairly- funded, our universities will be stronger, and even more of our public-school students will have future opportunities to make the national and global contributions that so many IH alumni have made.

Long live International House!

*" The Children Overboard Affair": In October, 2001, the then Australian Government released photos to the media of asylum seekers in a leaky boat off the coast of Western Australia. There were also people in the water. The Government maintained that the photos showed children being thrown overboard. This caused community outrage and stirred up extreme resentment towards refugees. This was a month before the Federal Elections. In fact, the photos showed a sinking boat and parents holding their children and jumping for their lives into the sea. The photos showed the extraordinarily brave, mass rescue of the asylum seekers by the Captain and crew of HMAS Adelaide. Subsequently, an exhaustive investigation by The Navy found no evidence of children being thrown overboard. A federal Senate Inquiry also came to the same conclusion.

*"The Tampa Affair": "In August 2001 Australian troops boarded the Norwegian freighter MV *Tampa* off Christmas Island. The commander of the

vessel, Captain Arne Rinnan, had rescued hundreds of asylum-seekers from a stranded Indonesian fishing boat in the Indian Ocean and was attempting to bring them to Australia. The ‘*Tampa* Crisis’ became the catalyst for Australia’s new ‘border protection’ policy. It also became a pivotal issue in the 2001 federal election campaign.”

In Memoriam: Birutė Don

By Dennis Schatz

Earlier this year, we lost one of our most active and vocal IH alumni members, Birutė Don, due to an untimely heart attack. She was a strong supporter of IH and SUIHAA activities. She was SUIHAA Treasurer for a period of time and strongly encouraged us to update our constitution and the SUIHAA webpage on the USyd website – which we accomplished. She actively submitted photographs to the Rosemary Berrick Photography Competition and organized a photo sharing session among SUIHAA members. She suggested we invite the photo competition judges to do a webinar about their selection process and to provided tips for award-winning photos – again something we accomplished. Most recently, Birutė was the incentive for the topic of the upcoming de Graaff-Elms Roundtable – see information about the Roundtable elsewhere in this Newsletter.

In memoriam:

Birutė Don

Birutė had amazing energy and influenced much of what SUIHAA has done. She will be missed. It only seems fitting to end this memorial to her with one of the photos she submitted to the Rosemary Berrick Photograph Competition and to share again her words from the May 2023 SUIHAA Newsletter.



Lachie (her grandchild) in a Tree

Words from Birutė Don in May 2023 SUIHAA Newsletter

A primary goal of International House is to create friendships which endured over space and time. This has been true for me. Between 1971 and 1973, I had the privilege of living in International House where I made many lifelong friends. Fortunately, I have been able to continue these friendships over the last 50 years. These friendships have continued through my visits to Sydney or visits to friends' places overseas.

My visit to Sydney in January this year was primarily to visit family and to attend the Lithuanian Festival and the Sydney Festival. It also proved to be a wonderful opportunity to share a lunch with Graeme de Graaff and Roger Westcombe (two former staff of International House) with their partners Lauris Elms and Christabel. We lunched at a delightful café on the banks of the Parramatta River near Sydney's Olympic Wharf.

My trip was also memorable for the opera "Sun and Sea". It was written and created by Lithuanian artists and a winner of the Golden Lion at the 2019 Venice Biennale. This English-language opera performance on sand, was viewed from the balcony with a constantly moving audience. It was an amazing transformation of Sydney Town Hall with the stage a sandy beach upon which scantily clad holidaymakers sunbathed and sang about their lives. See the following link to the video of the Sydney event, including photos of other unusual venues overseas that were used to stage opera performances:

<https://www.sydneyfestival.org.au/events/sun-and-sea>

My trip was soon followed by another trip to Sydney in March 2023. I returned to Sydney mainly for my mother's 99th birthday celebrations at the Lithuanian Club. I was again fortunate to be able to catch up with former International House residents at a restaurant in an idyllic marina setting at Roseville. Afterwards, we all experienced the delightful hospitality of Graham and Lyn Grant (formerly Woodger) with cakes and drinks at their home.

I will forever be grateful to former International House residents (Colin Morris, John Gascoigne and Kathy Bock) who helped me find the best nursing home for my mother in Sydney. Recently, Sydney Health prepared a video of mum and the volunteers and staff who treat mum like family (see following web site <https://slhd.health.nsw.gov.au/sydneyconnect/news/friendship-makes-difference>). The friends I made at International House are like a family to me.

*Words from
Birutė Don
(May 2023)*



IH reunion (January 2023) - Left to right: Roger Wescombe, Christabel Wescombe, Graeme de Graaff, Lauris Elms, Birute Don, Peter Don

*Words from
Birutė Don
(May 2023)*



IH reunion (March 2023) - Standing: Roger Wescombe, Graham Grant, Hilary Gray, Lyn Grant
Seated: Harry Bergsteiner, Colin Morris, Sid Gray, John Gascoigne