



News and views from the School

Twice termly: Issue no 22



Welcome to Insight 22

We recently visited the **School in Belgium** - the only School that operates in 3 languages, English, French and Flemish. This is also the only School that offers classes in French. You can be sure of a warm welcome at [SoPBelgium](#).

I'm tutoring **Part 1 Philosophy** again this term – very enjoyable. The course seems to attract so many interesting people. It's wonderful to hear the fresh observations from these new students each week.

Melbourne has been offering practical philosophy since 1977 and now numbers 650 students in a thriving environment. The Melbourne School has just bought a country building in Daylesford, about 90 minutes drive from the city. This country property, which accommodates 30 people, has been re-named Villa Sophia. Students are currently working to renovate the building.



It is hoped that this beautiful location, with mountain scenery, wildlife, forests and lakes will be fully functioning by December for residential events - see photo, right

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All good wishes,
Christine Lambie, editor

Sherry Moran is a senior student in London and tutors in the early part of the School. She also organises the ceramics department of Art in Action. Born in America, she has run her own business in London for many years. In March 2014 she won an award from the Magazine 'Enterprising Women' (see photo). The award was a tribute to the fast growth of women's businesses, their role as leaders in their communities, and the support in mentoring other women and girls as entrepreneurs.

Sherry Moran, London
A Real Live Philosopher



Award Ceremony in Florida

The occasion was an awards event for 71 women from 11 countries who were being honoured as Enterprising Women, women who were business owners. The size of

the businesses went all the way up to \$700 million. They came from North America, Africa, South Africa, Ghana, Egypt, India, the Netherlands, Hong Kong, Brazil, Switzerland, and from London, UK.

What a humbling experience to be receiving an award in such company. The buzz at the awards ceremony was joyful. The stories were tearful. The challenges were high and the applause was heartfelt and huge. As each woman took to the stage a short narration was read of what they accomplished. As I went up for my award, the contribution I had made to my community was all about the service I had been able to offer through the School of Economic Science.

Talking about the School

Prior to this application, I had never really thought of my years of service in the School as a contribution to society. But it is what I am most passionate about giving, so I spoke of the School and its purpose, *'I teach in a global, not for profit philosophy school aimed at helping people discover the highest meaning of life which comes from knowing who you are and what is of everlasting value. A cornerstone of the course is meditation. I teach around 60 students a year and have been teaching for 15 years. I am also passionate about ceramics. It is the art form that opens my heart. So I run the ceramics section for the largest art event in Europe, Art in Action, which attracts 25,000 visitors over the 4-day event. Its aim is to show what goes into creating beauty so that people can be touched by fine work. I have been running this section of the event for 24 years. Again this is not for profit. The underlying meaning of all this work is to bring peace, joy and well being to the community.'*

This was only the second time that I had spoken of my philosophical journey in the business community. I had kept the two worlds separate. The first time I spoke was at a small women's business meeting where many were suffering from stress and burn-out. I spoke from the heart about balance and being effective because you are part of something greater. They were fascinated and wanted to know more. Several have since taken up a Mindfulness practice on a regular basis.

What this showed me in this first instance of coming out of the philosophical 'closet' in the business world was that what we take for granted is not commonly understood or discussed where it is needed, in the everyday situations of our lives.

Small Business programme

I have also just completed the 'Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Business Programme'. This selects 10,000 entrepreneurs in the UK and US who want to grow their businesses and they put them through a 4-month boot-camp - the hardest thing I have ever done. (Yes, I somehow did manage to graduate.) When I saw what was on offer: knowledge from the most impressive list of entrepreneurs you could imagine, covering finance, people development, strategy, marketing and managing innovation, I decided that I would forget everything I thought I knew and just be open to what these amazing people were telling me. I would then apply it. We were constantly challenged in the programme and had to lay ourselves bare.

Again I spoke about the philosophical journey behind everything I did. The group later told me they were thrilled to know that they were working with a 'real, live philosopher'. I realised that our role as philosophers, pursuers of truth, is an important one.

My current business creates innovative digital business tools for the pharmaceutical industry to improve the speed it takes to launch new medicines into the global markets. It grew from just saying 'yes' to needs, being innovative and then figuring out the business model to support the solution.

Importance of failure

Many years ago I realised the 'importance of failure' in success and particularly in creating innovations. Failure brings learning. It also develops a greater inner strength that is based on humility. That depth allows you to see the value of setbacks and use them to move your company and your teams to greatness. Growth is a direct outcome from how you manage failure. Everyone in my small company has experienced a whopping failure, including myself. We are honest about our decisions and sincerely eager to know how it could have been improved. We have a process to share these situations with the entire group. This is done without criticism and because it is 'clean', there is no shame. Everyone learns. Failure is not seen as terminal, it is just 'another step along the way'. Innovation means taking risks and working with risk requires present moment awareness. My entire team went through a 6-week Mindfulness training programme. I begin every Monday morning meeting with the Awareness exercise. It is part of our culture.

Leadership

The last part of the awards application asks who has most influenced you during your career. My story was of an Egyptian wise man who was my mentor, leadership and management guru during my New York years at JP Morgan. His definition of leadership is that it is a combination of 'leadership, fellowship and followership'. To be able to change roles constantly, from leader to follower to colleague, is what marks exceptional leadership.

We all have many roles to play and being able to pass the baton at the right time to those who have the experience or insight is so powerful. *Now* is the time to be that which you really are, with those in front of you in the world, in all its places and spaces.



Top Tips

Items recommended by readers

Youth & Young Professionals, Sydney: Watch some of the last YYP Retreat and see what is coming in January 2015. Watch a video of this inspirational event at [YYPSydney](#). Be there.

King Alfred: Read this short history of the great 9th Century king, **composed in verse** by Brian Hodgkinson (senior student in London). Connect with the Anglo-Saxon roots of our culture. Highly recommended. Order from [SESbookshop](#).

3. TED talk: Image-maker Alexander Tsiaras shares a powerful medical visualization, showing human development from conception to birth and beyond. Compelling. Go to [TEDTsiaras](#).

4. Kindspring. Fed up with bad stuff happening in the world? Try out [Kindspring](#).

5. Plato's Cave: Watch this game interpretation of Plato's famous allegory. Can someone improve on this? [PlatoCaveGame](#)



The School in Brisbane started 20 years ago, with the initial (and continuing) efforts of Susan Garside. Later, Rex Howard moved from Sydney to further its development. Starting a School, as distinct from a single group, involves a great deal of work by a few people. The photo shows, from left to right, Jo and Rex Howard and Susan Garside.

Brisbane School: 20 years

Susan Garside and Rex Howard, Brisbane

Susan Garside:

How did the Brisbane School of Philosophy start? It had lots of beginnings. Initially, when I left London in 1980, I felt it would be good to get a school going in Brisbane 'sometime'. I had been so grateful for the School of Economic Science in London as a student in the early 70s that I wanted to give others what to me was so valuable. That was the seed.

But where is Brisbane? It's about half way up the east coast of Australia, subtropical in climate, and about 1,000 km from Sydney. When we arrived here, there were a few interesting organisations that I tried, but none of these offered ongoing contact. I mentioned this to a few friends in London and was sent some philosophy material. In the late 80's, in Brisbane, I met Paul, who was to become my husband. We started sharing books, ideas and the philosophy material.

Starting a group

The next beginning was precipitated by phone calls from students who had attended various schools around the world, and now found themselves in Brisbane. Paul and I were now married, so we started a group in our home: the babysitter, ex-students of other schools, their friends, our two children and two of their school friends. A motley group, but all very keen!

Those two years were fun times. One group member (Annette Henry) was a stickler for doing things properly so we had a refreshment team each week. She was in charge and everyone had to take turns at serving, using the tea break as a chance to practise something that had arisen that evening. Her phrase 'be a-Lert' stuck! We ended those two years with the group taking up meditation.

Begin with a bang

I was then asked – was Brisbane ready to start a School proper? I had no doubt the answer was 'yes'. We had a strong group and the time seemed right. Just before Christmas 1993, Rex Howard, a student of the Sydney School, phoned, asking could we begin in late January. So we found a venue, we advertised, gathered things together and waited.

The first night in early February 1994 started with a bang, literally. I have mentioned the subtropical climate; this was the wet season in January, and true to form, the heat and humidity built up during the day and the heavens opened late in the afternoon. The thunderstorm down the east coast delayed Rex's plane and we had to begin without him. A hundred new students and the deafening noise of rain and thunder! Rex arrived about an hour later and took over seamlessly. . . .

Rex Howard:

Late in 1993 I was asked to help with the Introductory Philosophy course in Brisbane. My wife, Jo, and I had

been students in the Sydney School since the mid-1970s. At the time I had only had peripheral connection with Susan and the Brisbane group. The proposition had its challenges, primarily distance. Sydney to Brisbane was a 12-hour drive or a 90-minute flight.

The first night of the Introductory class was in February 1994. Due to a massive thunderstorm, I arrived at the venue late but was able to take over for the second half.

Thereafter began 12 months of flying to Brisbane each week to conduct groups. The weekly routine was that Jo would pick me up from my office at 3 pm on a Thursday afternoon with a change of clothes. She would drive me to the airport where I would catch a flight to Brisbane, getting me to the class usually with only minutes to spare. After the group I would stay overnight with Susan and Paul, next day leaving at 4 am, arriving back in Sydney at 8 am to be picked up by Jo and taken straight to the office for the day.

It would be true to say that I became intimately familiar with airline check-in procedures and schedules. And increasingly practised at the art of detachment in the face of unexpected delays caused by Mother Nature and human error.

Taking the plunge

This continued until the end of the year. By that time we had three groups running. It was clear that commuting between Sydney and Brisbane was a limitation on the growth of the School and we had to move. I had been looking for a job in Brisbane for some time without success. But Jo and I decided that we would move anyway. I would try to set up my own business in Brisbane after we arrived.

We packed up our belongings in mid-January 1995. Our daughter, 14 years old at the time and quite settled in her school and circle of friends, did not share our enthusiasm for the move to Brisbane, which she regarded as being a little beyond the edge of civilisation. One of the students in Brisbane had located a house for us to rent. We had not seen the house before we arrived; we signed the lease for the house on the day of our arrival. This was in the days before email, text messaging, Facebook and mobile phones with cameras.

Service

Finding a home for us was just one example of the extraordinary service that the original group provided in those early days. They also sourced and obtained equipment, catered, served new students, prepared venues, provided flowers, cleaned toilets, and provided a mobile bookstore – all this until we found a regular place to meet. We were blessed to have had their company and support.

Within the first year of arriving we were able to introduce meditation. As with any new enterprise there were always jobs to do and gaps to fill and we found ourselves called on to do a whole range of tasks. This was made even more interesting by the birth of our son in June 1996. So Jo regularly brought him to the building to sleep while we conducted groups. It was always a matter of finding a way of meeting the need, regardless of personal circumstances. Somehow it always seemed to work out. The number of students in the School rose to around 200 fairly rapidly and then plateaued.

And now . . .

Currently, the School occupies a fine building, the original archbishop's residence built in 1862. We seem to have a predilection for heritage listed buildings. Over the years with a group of students interested in drama and the support of a lot of other students not so interested in being on stage, we have put on five full Shakespeare productions. We have also been running an annual Cultural Day, usually in November, open to the public.

We have offered the Introductory course three times a year every year since that first course in 1994 and have been able to offer the follow-on courses continuously during that period as well. Around 2,000 people have attended courses here since we began.

To mark our 20th anniversary we offered our Introductory Philosophy course for free at the beginning of this year. In looking back over the last 20 years I marvel gratefully at the selfless service and support of so many, which have brought us to where we are now.

Visit the Brisbane School's website at [SoPBrisbane](#)

Poetry Competition

Insight 21, sent out in July, announced a poetry competition inviting poems of up to 20 lines, on the subject of beauty. The judges said: "***It has been a privilege, a delight and a most moving experience to read and hear the voices of the composers of the poems on Beauty entered in the competition. All spoke from the heart. Many entries showed a skilful and creative use of both words and poetic structure, so that choosing a 'best' was difficult.***"

Many thanks to all those who sent in poems. The winning entry is published here, by Susan Whittall of Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, UK. To see other entries, go to [SESPoetry](#).

May 15th

Look - the swifts are here!
Cherry blossom picks the pink
out of a ragged magnolia.
Lilac nods gently in tune
with two beds of tulips.
Orange blossom chats with three late daffs
and kerria plies its way
across the fences.

Autumn's fireworks are lost
in the ground cover
of periwinkles, bluebells and forget-me-nots,
and an odd little geranium shows its shadow-shy face
among the cornflowers.

All this. All this and the memory
of yesterday's blushing bullfinch
not two feet away from me.
One heart can't hold all of this,
can't hold so much spring
falling so casually into the arms
of an unknown summer.

Spiritual Sites

Lincoln Cathedral Labyrinth Festival, August 6-27, 2014

John Woodward, head of the Lincoln branch of the School in the UK, took the initiative in organizing this diverse event, initially at the suggestion of the cathedral. Lincoln cathedral dates back to 1185; in medieval times, it was the tallest building in the world.

The idea of holding this Festival goes back to an answer from Shri Shantananda Saraswati: "*The civilisation and culture one lives in have certain sacred centres which arouse emotion. These centres should be found out and be brought to notice in such a way that they could see the underlying divinity in the outward manifestations of the culture and civilization; . . . the emotional power would be aroused*".

The centrepiece of the Festival was a full size copy of the



13thC Chartres labyrinth, drawn in chalk on the floor of Lincoln Cathedral for people to walk its pathway. The shape is likened to the journey through life, with many twists and

turns; keeping to the path and reaching the centre one may receive an insight into life's purpose, then return to fulfill it.

With this in mind, the services of architects, graphic designers, textile designers, artists, actors, writers, composers, musicians and others were engaged to create an exhibition showing ideas about labyrinths.

The ethos of the School was also in mind so, for the most part, participants gave their services free. A team called the Labyrinth Angels had the special job to care for the maintenance of the labyrinth and to welcome and assist visitors who came to walk it. The project sought to encourage participation from as many as possible from the community of Lincoln.

The exhibition panels and artists' canvases lining the length of the south aisle arches looked impressive and contained much that was of real interest. There were two dramatic presentations which were well-attended and very well-received by the audience. Labyrinth Workshops exploring spiritual and artistic themes were held in the south transept of the cathedral. They were an important part of the scheme and professionally delivered. The children's workshops were even better attended. The 20-strong choir *Discantvs*, not only sang beautifully but used the labyrinth stage to move around, cleverly choreographing what they were singing. The Finale candle-lit concert was performed by singers from Lincoln. The audience was seated round the labyrinth, with rapt attention, creating a powerful sense of the unity between audience, singers and building.

Meanwhile the general public daily visiting the Cathedral would encounter the labyrinth. A little girl called Amy went quietly round the labyrinth by herself watched by her mother and grandmother, stopped for a while in the centre and followed the path out again. She then filled in one of the visitor questionnaires and in a spidery childish hand she wrote, "*I think it was*



excellent. I would like to do it again. It was one of the best things I've done in my life, thank you". Amy was 7 years old!

And so how did the Festival go? Really rather well. The chalk labyrinth with all its geometric intricacy looked ethereal and defied comprehension. The handsome banners hanging above the nave with their Platonic message of true happiness gave a focus.

The public, young and old, and all those involved in putting on the festival and even those on the periphery of the event found a companionship that broke down habitual barriers. But above all, there were widespread comments speaking of fresh insights and experiences of a larger and finer world, which confirms what these medieval cathedrals were built to do.

See more [LincolnLabyrinth](#)

Reader Feedback



*As is often the case, the latest Insight moved me to tears of joy and gratitude. **Cape Town***

*Thank you from Australia. I look forward to each issue & always seem to find a gem from each. **Victoria, Australia***

*Another lovely issue filled with truth, filled with the sweetness of life. Each story touches me inviting me to send out prayers of thanksgiving to the writers and the School. Let me add: the sweetness of life in the midst of its challenges. Clearly each of these writers face challenges making it all richer and deeper in meaning. **New York***

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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