

Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XVIII Number 5, May 2010

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, May 27, 7:30 PM. Monthly Meeting Caltech Y is located off San Pasqual between Hill and Holliston, south side. You will see two curving walls forming a gate to a path-- our building is just beyond. Help us plan future actions on Sudan, the 'War on Terror', death penalty and more. Special guest Emily Fernandez of Fair Trade Pasadena will give a presentation and bring samples of fair trade products.

Tuesday, June 8, 7:30 PM. Letter writing meeting at Caltech Athenaeum, corner of Hill and California in Pasadena. This informal gathering is a great way for newcomers to get acquainted with Amnesty!

Sunday, June 20, 6:30PM. Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion group. This month we read "The Right of Thirst" by Frank Huyler.

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi everyone

This will be short and sweet as it is Monday evening already and I'm still working on the newsletter!

Although Group 22 members did not participate in the annual Doo-Dah parade this year, we did have a table at the Pasadena Earth Day Fair. Tons of kids made cards decorated with stickers and stamped designs to send to a Chinese prisoner of conscience, Tan Zuoren, who spoke out against the shoddy school building construction in China that caused so many children to die in the May 2009 Sichuan earthquake. Thanks to Joyce and Stevi for organizing this and to those who helped at the table.

Amnesty members have the opportunity to staff information tables for AI at local rock and other music concerts. Read the article by Laura Brown in this newsletter for details!

Con cariño,
Kathy

RIGHTS READERS

Human Rights Book Discussion Group

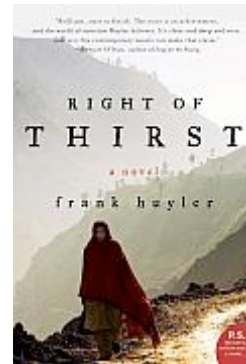
Keep up with Rights Readers at
<http://rightsreaders.blogspot.com>

Next Rights Readers meeting:

Sunday, June 20, 6:30 PM

Vroman's Bookstore

**695 E. Colorado Boulevard
In Pasadena**



Author Biography



An emergency physician in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Frank Huyler is the author of the essay collection *The Blood of Strangers* as well as the novel *The Laws of Invisible Things*. He grew up in Iran, Brazil, and Japan.

BOOK REVIEW RIGHT OF THIRST

By Frank Huyler

Book Review from the New York Times

Frank Huyler has said that being a doctor is "the best day job that a writer can have." You can see his reasoning. A doctor has access to material other novelists might only dream of: dealing intimately with strangers, encountering people at moments of high drama, observing close-up the interplay of flesh and spirit. And in "Right of Thirst," Huyler the novelist shows many of the gifts — observation, precision, tact — you might hope for in Huyler the doctor.

The novel's narrator, Charles Anderson, is a cardiologist in his late 50s, modestly successful in his career but not in other areas of his life. The book opens with the death of his wife after a long illness. Charles has assisted in hastening that end, though this is discreetly alluded to rather than stated outright, and the whole episode is described in spare, enviably efficient prose. Stricken with grief and remorse — for the death, for his inadequacies as a husband — Charles attends a lecture on the plight of earthquake victims and is inspired to volunteer for work in a refugee camp.

And yet once there, high in a remote mountain valley, any notion he might have of redemption through good works begins to evaporate. The camp is inadequately equipped to receive a mass of refugees, who in any case show no signs of turning up. Charles's attempt to recast his mission, providing medical help to nearby villagers, is sabotaged by fatalism and poverty. Frustration is interrupted by drama: he amputates a young girl's gangrenous foot, saving her life while knowing that as a cripple she hasn't much of a life to look forward to. Then the camp's army-issue tents attract the wrong kind of attention from neighboring hostile forces, and a near-farcical flight ensues.

Although the country where all this takes place is unnamed, it isn't hard to identify. In a literal sense it is Kashmir, but in a figurative one it is the shadowy territory known as Greenland. With his sense of failure, his detachment, his stereotypically American habit of trying to solve problems with money, Charles could walk into any [Graham Greene](#) novel, no questions asked. Greene-ish tinges are also noticeable in several of the other characters — notably the jauntily sinister general who tries to threaten Charles into silence about events taking place in the mountains — and in the novel's tone, which is not so much disillusioned as determined not to entertain illusions.

After a while, though, this tone starts to seem like a disguise. "Right of Thirst" gives the initial impression of being a deeply serious book, but nothing in it is examined very deeply or very seriously. Huyler's descriptions of externals — landscape, weather, the operation on the girl — are frequently marvelous, but at times he slips into cliché (a helicopter hovers "like a dragonfly") and his characters sometimes fail to talk like real people. "Who are you, Charles?" his wife asks in a remembered argument. "Who are you really?" I

don't know about you, but my marital rows rarely get that existential.

Charles himself is curiously shallow: you never get a clear sense of what it was in his marriage he feels so guilty about. His feelings on other matters are often so nuanced you can't work them out, and for all his talk of remorse, his encounters tend to end on a note of self-justification. There's material for comedy here, if only Huyler had spotted it. In the end, "Right of Thirst" serves as a reminder that one quality you don't necessarily look for in a doctor is essential in a novelist: imagination.

Robert Hanks is a freelance critic based in London.

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE GAO ZHISHENG

By Joyce Wolf

Group 22 has now completed the process of adopting Prisoner of Conscience Gao Zhisheng (pronounced Gow Jir-sheng). He is a human-rights lawyer who was detained by the Chinese authorities in February 2009.

We received Gao's case file from the AI Individuals at Risk program on March 26. At that time Gao's whereabouts were unknown. A few days later, the New York Times published an [article](#) stating, "Gao Zhisheng, the Chinese rights activist who has been missing for more than a year, has resurfaced near his hometown in northern China." The article reported that Gao in a brief telephone conversation said that he was fine, that he had been sentenced and released from custody.

Two weeks later in an interview with Associated Press in Beijing, Gao said that he was [giving up activism](#) and wished only to be reunited with his family. (His wife and children have been in the U.S. for about a year.) On May 1 the [New York Times reported](#) that Gao had again disappeared.

"Associates said Mr. Gao failed to return to a Beijing apartment on April 20 after spending more than a week in Urumqi, the capital of western China's Xinjiang region, where he had been visiting his father-in-law. Mr. Gao had telephoned his father-in-law as his plane left Urumqi, saying he would call upon his arrival in Beijing, they said. That was his last contact with the outside world."

There's a lot of mystery and confusion surrounding the story of Gao Zhisheng, but one thing is quite clear: China is attempting to intimidate lawyers who take up human rights cases. See, for example, [AI's public statement](#) concerning Liu Wei and Tang Jitian, two lawyers who just had their law licenses revoked. <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA17/022/2010/en>

"These lawyers constitute an important part of the weiquan ('rights defense') movement, which is using Chinese law to protect rights of individuals. Like other human rights defenders in China, these individual weiquan lawyers have been harassed, assaulted, kept under surveillance and prosecuted for protecting the rights of others."

Another lawyer in China who has suffered retribution for his human rights work is Wang Yonghong, who defended Cong Rixu, an imprisoned Falun Gong practitioner whose wife is now in Pasadena and has attended Group 22 meetings. For more information see her blog at <http://tianlu.blog.epochtimes.com/> (scroll down for the English if your Chinese is a bit weak).

Let's get started working for Gao Zhisheng. AI suggests writing to the Director of the Beijing Public Security Bureau:

MA Zhenchuan Juzhang
Beijingshi Gong'anju
9 Qianmen Dongdajie
Dongchengqu
Beijingshi 100740
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Letters should call for the authorities to:

- release Gao Zhisheng immediately and unconditionally;
- guarantee that he will be free from any kind of torture and ill-treatment;
- order a full and impartial investigation into allegations that Gao Zhisheng has suffered ill treatment in detention, including beatings and inadequate access to medical treatment and bring those responsible to justice;
- allow peaceful work by human rights defenders, and also exercise of rights to freedom of assembly and expression, in line with their international commitments.

GROUP 22 MEMBERS ROCK ON WITH PETER GABRIEL

By Laura G. Brown

Two Pasadena AI activists answered organizer Kelly Giles' plea to work the Amnesty table at the Peter Gabriel concert May 7 at the Hollywood Bowl. Vincent De Stefano and Laura Brown reached out to concertgoers before, during, and after the concert, urging them to sign petitions on behalf of prisoners of conscience. According to Giles, the actions for prisoners in Tibet, Myanmar, Laos, and Eritrea garnered a total of 817 signatures from Peter Gabriel fans, with the Tibet action attracting the most interest. In that case, Buddhist monks and nuns in Tibet are being held in terrible conditions in Chinese-run jails.

Peter Gabriel has long been a friend of AI. He also sponsors his own project called Witness, which gives video cameras to crusaders against political abuse. Gabriel helped found the group nearly 20 years ago, and it now works in more than 60 countries bringing previously unrecorded voices and images to decision makers' attention, according to the group's website.

I asked Giles about his role in the Amnesty actions at local concerts, and he said: "My informal title might be something along the lines of 'Southern California volunteer coordinator for Rhythm n Rights', which coordinates all of Amnesty's tabling opportunities with a lot of great, socially-conscious bands." Rhythm n Rights is coordinating efforts at the Sting concert in June, and also for the next leg of U2's tour.

When asked how AI activists and music lovers could assist in Rhythm n Right's outreach, Giles said:

"We typically do not find out which tours Amnesty will be tabling until about a month or two before the actual concerts. On average, I would say that Amnesty usually gets invited to table anywhere from 8 to 12 shows a year, and that I am usually lead volunteer for at least half of those shows, either in LA or Orange County. For example, besides Peter Gabriel this past weekend, I will be lead volunteer for Sting in Orange County next month, and there is a good chance I will be lead volunteer for both Santana in July and Dave Matthews Band in August."

Interested in acquainting the public with Amnesty's important mission and collecting scores of signatures on urgent actions? Not to mention drinking in the glorious strains of your favorite rock group's music on a warm Southern California night at no extra charge? Contact Kelly Giles at kellyab3@gmail.com.

DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

May has flown by and the death penalty continues alive and active in the United States. First the good news for one death row inmate.

Richard Smith (m)

On 19 May, the Governor of Oklahoma commuted the death sentence of Richard Smith to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole, accepting the state Pardon and Parole Board's recommendation to him to do so. Richard Smith had been due to be executed on 25 May.

Stays of Execution

Stacey Johnson, Arkansas; Melbert Ford, Georgia; Marlon Kiser, Tennessee; Richard Tabler, Texas; and Jack Jones, Arkansas have had stays of execution for now.

May executions

The following individuals were executed in May:

Kevin Varga, Texas, May 12;
Michael Beuke, Ohio, May 13;
Billy Galloway, Texas, May 13;
Rogello Cannaday, Texas, May 19;
Paul Woodward, Mississippi, May 19;
Gerald Holland, Mississippi, May 20; and
Darick Walker, Virginia, May 20.

Scheduled executions for the end of May include John Alba, Texas, May 25 and Thomas Whisenant, Alabama, May 27.

Upcoming in June

Ten executions are scheduled for June. One person, Ronnie Lee Gardner (Utah), has requested and been granted to be executed by firing squad. Mr. Gardner has been on death row for 25 years. According to an Amnesty Urgent Action, both the father and the fiancée of Michael Burdnett, the murder victim, are on record, through sworn

statements, that they do not want Mr. Gardner executed. Amnesty quotes Mr. Burdnett's father as saying, "I do not believe Gardner should be executed. I do not believe my son, Michael Burdnett, would want Gardner to be executed. I do not believe Gardner should be executed because I do not believe the murder was premeditated. Gardner himself had been shot and his shooting my son was a spur of the moment reaction. Furthermore, I do not believe Gardner is the same person today that he was in 1985. My son was a caring and generous person who tried to help others. It would not have been in his nature to condone Gardner's execution. He would not have approved of it at all."

An online Amnesty action on Mr. Gardner's behalf is available at <http://takeaction.amnestyusa.org/siteapps/advocacy/index.aspx?c=jhKPIXPCIoE&b=2590179&template=x.ascx&action=14271>

Troy Davis

An evidentiary hearing for Troy Davis is scheduled for June 23, 2010. Information about Mr. Davis' case and action opportunities are available at <http://www.amnestyusa.org/death-penalty/troy-davis-finality-over-fairness/page.do?id=1011343>

Web Links

Martha sent us a couple of interesting links to check out:

<http://intlawgrrls.blogspot.com/2010/05/iachr-on-death-row-phenomenon.html>

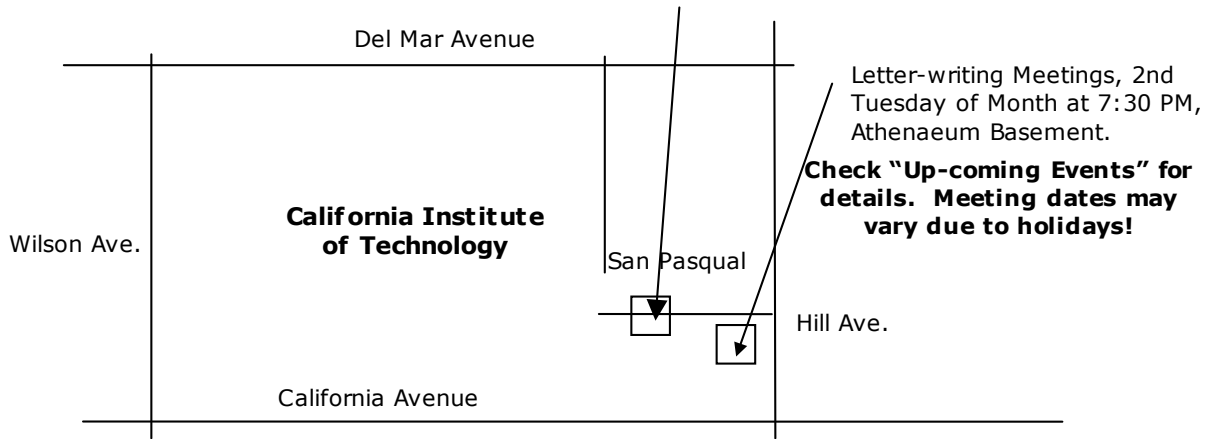
<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2010/05/20/MN2J1DF46L.DTL>

I know that the death penalty continues around the world, too, and we often write on behalf of these individuals; however, for me, action in my own country is so important. Since the US reinstated the death penalty in 1976, over 1,200 executions have been carried out.

MONTHLY LETTER COUNT

UA's	10
Total	10
To add your letters to the total contact lwkamp@gmail.com .	

Monthly Meetings, 4th Thursday of Month, 7:30 PM,
Caltech Y Lounge.



From the 210 exit on Lake Avenue, head south, turn left on Del Mar
From the 110 continue on Arroyo Parkway north, turn right on California
Street parking is generally available.

Amnesty International Group 22
The Caltech Y
Mail Code 5-62
Pasadena, CA 91125
www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22/
<http://rightsreaders.blogspot.com>



Amnesty International's mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote all human rights.