

Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XX Number 5, May 2012

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, May 24, 7:30 PM. Monthly Meeting. We meet at the Caltech Y, Tyson House, 505 S. Wilson Ave., Pasadena. (This is just south of the corner with San Pasqual. Signs will be posted.) We will be planning our activities for the coming months. Please join us! Refreshments provided.

Tuesday, June 12, 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 17, 6:30 PM. Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion group. This month we read "Children and Fire" by Ursula Hegi.

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi All

Thanks to Joyce, Lucas, and Stevi for doing the newsletter last month and to Joyce for her regular assistance.

I was feeling overwhelmed due to the sudden death of my mother the last week of March, and I had the responsibility to organize a memorial gathering in her honor that 50-60 friends and relatives attended at my parents' home in Tarzana. It was a lovely event and a chance to catch up with people we hadn't seen in a long time. Thanks to everyone who expressed their condolences to me, Robert, and our family. Thanks to Paula for attending the celebration and for the donation in my mother's honor that was made by Group 22 to the CSUN Arts Council.

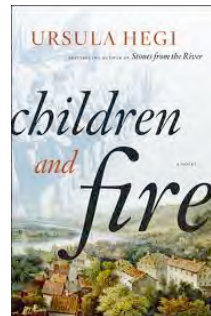
At our last monthly meeting, Wen told us about the blind Chinese activist who had escaped house arrest and made his way to the US Embassy. Chen Guangcheng is now in the US to study law. Also see Joyce's piece on Chen in this newsletter.

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 17, 6:30 PM

Vroman's Bookstore
695 E. Colorado, Pasadena

Children and Fire
by Ursula Hegi

About the Author

Multiple award winner Ursula Hegi moved from West Germany to the U.S. in 1964. She has lived on both coasts, in the states of Washington and New York.



Hegi's first two books had American settings; but when she was in her '40s, she began investigating her cultural heritage in stories about life in Germany. Her critically acclaimed 1994 novel *Stones from the River* gathered further momentum when it was selected in 1999 as an Oprah's Book Club pick.

Among numerous honors and awards, Hegi has received an NEA Fellowship, several PEN Syndicated Fiction Awards, and a book award from the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association (PNBA) in 1991 for *Floating in My Mother's Palm*. She has taught creative writing and has written many reviews for acclaimed publications like *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *The Washington Post*.

Book Review

June 24, 2011

Testing the Conscience of a Village Under the Nazis
By LEAH HAGER COHEN

CHILDREN AND FIRE

By Ursula Hegi

All novelists are godlike. Sovereign creators of worlds they populate with beings wrought from

something less than dust and rib, they set events in motion and determine their consequences. The situation is less ideal than it sounds: omnipotence can be a dreary limitation. That's why the best novelists are also childlike. Bent over impalpable dollhouses, moving their lips while they rearrange the furniture and figures, they give themselves over to such deep play that their stories read less like a premeditated imposition than obedience to the whispered suggestions of the universe.

Ursula Hegi belongs to this second category, and she attends not to a single dollhouse but to an entire imagined village. Again and again, she has returned to this setting, investing it with renewed curiosity and a desire to feel her way down new paths, coming at many of the same rooms and characters, even the same story lines, from different angles. One senses in Hegi a willingness to lose herself in play, in the service of play. So it's fitting that her latest work is concerned in part with the awful, awe-full seriousness of children's play.

"Children and Fire," is the fourth novel Hegi has set in Burgdorf, a German village "hundreds of kilometers" from Berlin where everyone seems to know everyone else — and where that knowing entails a multigenerational grasp of the history, secrets and myths that make up each person's lineage. This is a village with a chorus of old women who say things like "During those times when there was an abundance of dying, there was also an abundance of poetry." It's a village in which "the taxidermist gave glass eyes to the children . . . on St. Martin's Day, not sweets or apples like other merchants." It's a village with a chess club and a pigeon club, a "midwife to the dying" who reads verses at the bedsides of those drawing their final breaths, a village with an "unknown benefactor" who slips inside people's houses to deposit, uncannily, the very items they've been pining for: roller skates, a phonograph, a block of cheese. But lest Burgdorf sound a little too picturesque and gemütlich, the village is also — like any place, like every place — home to cruelty and cowardice and harm, qualities Hegi makes all the more disturbing by locating them in both large-scale events and in the vicissitudes of daily life, in the personages of the well-meaning, the hard-working, the innocent.

Much of the narrative unfolds over a single day: Feb. 27, 1934, the first anniversary of the burning of the Reichstag. This fire, which destroyed the Parliament building in Berlin and for which a

Communist was accused of arson, has allowed the Nazis to consolidate their power. By the time the novel begins, many Burgdorf boys have joined the Hitler-Jugend. Books have been burned in the town square. Jewish families are leaving. The remaining Jewish children must now attend a segregated school in the synagogue, and a beloved Jewish teacher has lost her job. This firing proves pivotal, setting the story in motion — although we will have to wait almost until the novel's end to learn exactly what happened, to see how deeply it continues to affect the protagonist, Thekla Jansen.

A former student of the dismissed teacher, Thekla has agreed to take over her mentor's class of fourth-grade boys, "knowing she was doing something wrong" but rationalizing the decision as a way to "save the position" until the older teacher can "come back." Thekla's guilt and subsequent efforts to make amends for her betrayal (while simultaneously denying it to herself) shape everything that ensues, from how she relates to the day's events to her pressing need to understand her own past. Alternating sections of the book exhume that past, tracing the story of her birth and parentage, her parents' beginnings and those of the townspeople whose lives intersect with hers in true Burgdorfian fashion.

Hegi follows Thekla as she struggles to divert her thoughts from acknowledging the great ugliness looming over Germany, repeatedly redirecting her attention to more immediate exigencies: her class of 9- and 10-year-olds. "She loves them all: the boys with crossed eyes and the boys with crooked teeth; the brainy boys and the beautiful boys; the boys from good families and the boys with Rotznasen — runny noses," and even the bullies, in whom she seeks out what there is to praise, to nurture. She recites poems to them and takes them on walks. She wants to teach them courage, tries to impress on them her former teacher's lesson that "we can alter fate," that "for us, as humans, there is choice." Yet Hegi reveals, with fine, damning precision, that choosing the right course is anything but easy. Writ large or small, the same complicated human impulses distort the picture. On the playground as in Parliament, fear thrives alongside love, the giddy thrill of power alongside the burn of shame.

In this novel as in others (particularly "Stones From the River," many of whose characters show up here; also, notably, in "Tearing the Silence," her nonfiction exploration of German

identity after the Holocaust), Hegi makes a considerable effort to engage our moral imagination. Her aim is signaled in the opening lines: "A winter morning in 1934. Imagine frost on the windowpanes of the schoolhouse in this village by the Rhein, milk blossoms of frost."

By addressing the reader directly, Hegi implicitly conveys an intention to reach beyond the bounds of fiction. At best, this is like inviting us to kneel beside the toy village along with her, involving us more deeply in the fluid flow of her story. At other times, though, the urge leads us astray. Occasionally, Hegi can't resist pointing out the parallels between events in little Burgdorf and those on a grand scale. When the children gang up on a weaker classmate, Thekla intervenes, only to realize that "any moment now, they may turn on her, no longer individual boys she can guide but a pack. . . . It comes to her how, with the government, too, she believed she could manage it, yet once unleashed, it was overtaking her, all of them." The novel falters under the pedantry of such moments, but thankfully they are rare.

And what is it Hegi means us to apprehend? Not simply that each of us harbors the capacity for wrongdoing or that insisting on a divide between good and bad people is itself harmful. We are, she shows us — sadly, tenderly — incapable of not doing wrong. Yet she also hints at the many forms our redemption can take: imagining, doubting, telling our truths, gathering together to listen to one another's "tales around the flames."

Leah Hager Cohen's latest novel, "The Grief of Others," will be published in September.

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE

Gao Zhisheng

By Joyce Wolf

The topic of human rights in China has been very much in the news this past month, thanks to the dramatic escape of blind activist Chen Guangcheng and the tense diplomatic negotiations between the U.S. and China that followed. News stories often mentioned Gao Zhisheng, Group 22's adopted prisoner of conscience, as another case of China's brutal retaliation against a human rights lawyer. Here's a background bit about dissidents who

escaped that features Gao Zhisheng's wife: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/galleries/2012/05/01/5-chinese-dissidents-who-managed-daring-escapes-and-one-who-didn-t.html>.

CECC (Congressional-Executive Commission on China) conducted a hearing in Washington on May 3 about the case of Chen Guangcheng, who was then in a hospital after leaving the US Embassy. The hearing suddenly turned into breaking news when witness Bob Fu of ChinaAid received a call on his cellphone from Chen in his hospital room. Chairman Chris Smith (R-NJ) and Bob Fu spoke with Chen, who said he would like to come to the US and have the sort of rest he hadn't had in 10 years. The recorded webcast is available on www.cecc.org. It was very exciting to watch in real-time.

Today my Sunday paper has an article on the safe arrival in New York of Chen Guangcheng and his wife and two children. He is happy to be in the U.S. and to have the opportunity to study law, but he is concerned about his nephew and other family members who remain in China.

Next Saturday (May 26) the Visual Artists Guild will honor Chen Guangcheng at their 23rd annual Tiananmen commemoration at the Golden Dragon in Chinatown. (<http://www.visual-artists-guild.org>) On June 9, Visual Artists Guild of New York will honor our Gao Zhisheng, and his daughter Geng Ge will accept the award on behalf of her father.

If you have not already sent a message of solidarity to Gao Zhisheng, or if you want to send him another one, you can find his prison address on our updated page at <http://www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22/GaoPOC/GaoZhisheng.html>. You will find other suggestions for action there as well. Postage to China is \$1.05.

DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

Recently at an AI meeting, we discussed the use of one drug vs three drugs used in executions. The question of what's the difference? came up. First, let's look at what we can learn about lethal injection from the website howstuffworks (<http://people.howstuffworks.com/lethal-injection5.htm>). This information is dated

because sodium thiopental is no longer used but we can substitute pentobarbital.

How Lethal Injection Works

Some states use multiple executioners, all of whom inject drugs into an IV tube -- but only one of the executioners is actually delivering the lethal injection. None of the executioners know who has delivered the lethal dose and who has injected drugs into a dummy bag.

The drugs are administered, in this order:

- **Anesthetic - Sodium thiopental**, which has the trademark name **Pentothal**, puts the inmate into a deep sleep. This drug is a barbiturate that induces general [anesthesia](#) when administered intravenously. It can reach effective clinical concentrations in the brain within 30 seconds, according to an Amnesty International report. For surgical operations, patients are given a dose of 100 to 150 milligrams over a period of 10 to 15 seconds. For executions, as many as 5 grams (5,000 mg) of Pentothal may be administered. This in itself is a lethal dose. It's believed by some that after this anesthetic is delivered, the inmate doesn't feel anything.
- Saline solution flushes the intravenous line.
- **Paralyzing agent - Pancuronium bromide**, also known as **Pavulon**, is a muscle relaxant that is given in a dose that stops breathing by paralyzing the diaphragm and [lungs](#). Conventionally, this drug takes effect in one to three minutes after being injected. In many states, this drug is given in doses of up to 100 milligrams, a much higher dose than is used in surgical operations -- usually 40 to 100 micrograms per one kilogram of body weight. Other chemicals that can be used as a paralyzing agent include **tubocurarine chloride** and **succinylcholine chloride**.
- Saline solution flushes the intravenous line.
- **Toxic agent** (not used by all states) - **Potassium chloride** is given at a lethal dose in order to interrupt the electrical signaling essential to heart functions. This induces cardiac arrest.

Within a minute or two after the last drug is administered, a physician or medical technician declares the inmate dead. The amount of time between when the prisoner leaves the holding cell and when he or she is declared dead may be just 30 minutes. Death usually occurs anywhere from five to 18 minutes after the execution order is given.

So now we know how it works.

For some information on the one drug procedure, I went to Death Penalty Focus. According to DPF, "The process of lethal injection using just one drug follows nearly the same procedure, except the inmate dies from the one large dose of anesthetic, either sodium thiopental or pentobarbital." (<http://www.deathpenalty.org/article.php?id=52>)

Arizona, South Dakota, Idaho, Ohio and Washington now use the one-drug method. April 25th Thomas Kemp was executed in Arizona using one drug. According to his lawyer, Tim Gabrielsen, Mr. Kemp began to shake violently after the drug was injected. Is this cruel and unusual punishment? Other people who witnessed Mr. Kemp's execution disagreed with Mr. Gabrielsen's account of the event.

Momentum seems to be building that one-drug executions are "a more humane, safer protocol," according to Richard Dieter, director of the Death Penalty Information Center in Washington.

Three days after the SAFE Campaign received certification to have its initiative on the November ballot, Attorney General Kamala D. Harris filed an appeal seeking to counter a February ruling that halted a revised three-drug lethal injection method. Also in that appeal was information about an order from Governor Jerry Brown for prison officials to consider the one-drug method for executions in California.

Without lessening the horror of what many inmates are convicted of committing, I continue to wonder about the State's right to commit murder.

Wrong Man Executed

Professor James Liebman, Columbia Law School, and 12 students have investigated the execution of Carlos DeLuna. *Los Tocayos Carols: An Anatomy of a Wrongful Execution* (<http://www3.law.columbia.edu/hrlr/lrc/>) shows how the wrong Carlos was executed.

Here are a few items from an article in *The Guardian*
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/may/15/carlos-texas-innocent-man-death>):

- No blood samples were collected and tested from the crime scene.
- Fingerprinting was so badly handled no useable fingerprints were taken.
- None of the items found on the floor of the crime scene– a cigarette stub, chewing gum, a button, comb and beer cans – were forensically examined for saliva or blood.
- No scraping of the victim’s fingernails for traces of the attackers skin were taken.
- No measurements were taken of the footprint left in the pool of the victim’s blood.
- In fewer than two hours after the murder happened, the owner of the bar that was the crime scene was allowed to wash it down, sweeping away vital evidence.
- Twenty years later the one eyewitness who identified Carlos DeLuna said he had trouble telling one Hispanic person apart from another.

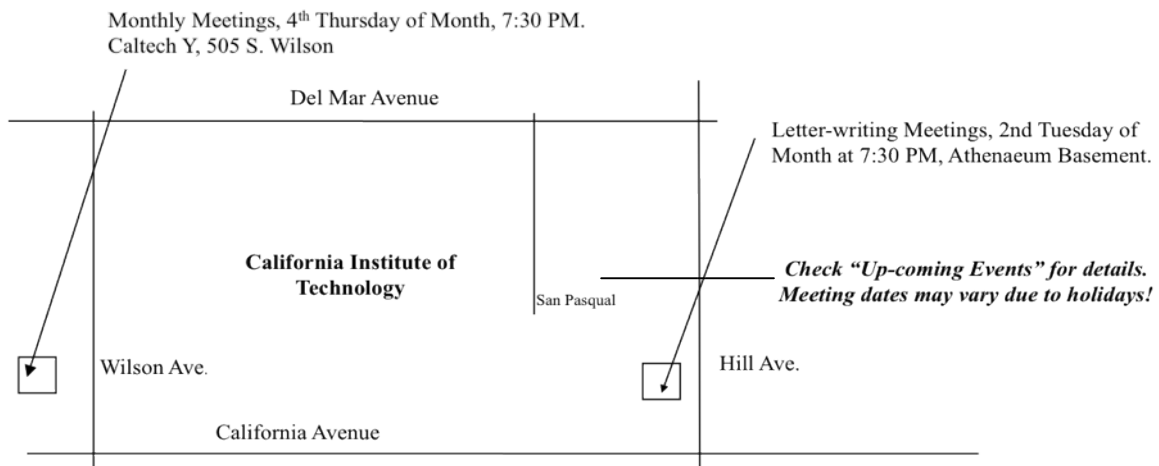
Stays of Execution

May 2012		
2	Anthony Bartee	Texas
9	Todd Wessinger	Louisiana
13-19	Eric Robert (volunteer)	South Dakota
16	Steven Staley	Texas
16	Samuel Lopez	Arizona
	(rescheduled for 6/27)	

Executions

April 2012		
25	Thomas Kemp	Arizona
	1-drug lethal injection	
26	Beunka Adams	Texas
	3-drug lethal injection	
May 2012		
1	Michael Selsor	Oklahoma
	3-drug lethal injection	

GROUP 22 MONTHLY LETTER COUNT	
UAs	22
China postcards	6
Total	28
To add your letters to the total contact lwkamp@gmail.com .	



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 C1-128
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.