

# Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XXI Number 8, August 2013

## UPCOMING EVENTS

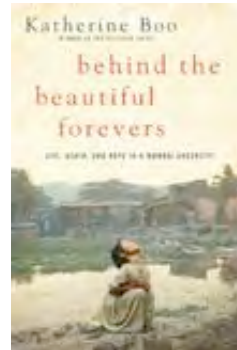
**Thursday, August 22, 7:30 PM.** Monthly Meeting. We meet at the Caltech Y, Tyson House, 505 S. Wilson Ave., Pasadena. (This is just south of the corner with San Pasqual. Signs will be posted.) We will be planning our activities for the coming months. Please join us! Refreshments provided.

**Tuesday, September 10, 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, September 15, 6:30 PM.** Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion group. This month we read "Behind the Beautiful Forever" by Katherine Boo.

## RIGHTS READERS Human Rights Book Discussion Group

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



**Next Rights Readers meeting:**  
**Sunday, September 15**  
**6:30 pm**

*Behind the Beautiful Forever*

by Katherine Boo

Vroman's Bookstore

695 E. Colorado, Pasadena

## COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi All

Well we are in the throes of summer. School started last week with a bang as those of us in the nursing office were dispatched to middle schools to follow up on students coming to school without the required Tdap vaccine for 7<sup>th</sup> grade entry.

Rob and I got to spend a week in Seattle with the cousins on my dad's side celebrating 3 birthdays (including my own!) the last week of July. I had never been there before. The weather was great – no rain – and there is so much to see and do.

I'm looking forward to reading September's book selection. It has gotten great reviews.

The violence in Egypt has escalated, with recent clashes between Morsi supporters and the security forces resulting in over 600 dead and hundreds wounded. Find the latest info and actions at the AIUSA website:

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/news>

Laura Brown has had a letter about Edward Snowden published in the LA Times: here's the link:

<http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/letters/la-le-0804-sunday-snowden-asylum-20130804,0,6899599.story>

Con Cariño,  
Kathy

## Author Bio

**Katherine Boo** is a staff writer at *The New Yorker* and a former reporter and editor for *The Washington Post*. She learned to report at the alternative weekly, *Washington City Paper*, after which she worked as a writer and co-editor of *The Washington Monthly* magazine. Over the years, her reporting from disadvantaged communities has been awarded a Pulitzer Prize, a MacArthur "Genius" grant, and a National Magazine Award for Feature Writing. For the last decade, she has divided her time between the United States and India, the birthplace of her husband, Sunil Khilnani. This is her first book.



Photo credit: Hefeen Weivaan

## TRANSLATORS



**Unnati Tripathi** started working for Katherine as a translator and researcher in April 2008. Three and a half years later, Unnati had become Katherine's trusted co-investigator and critical

interlocutor, helping to bring the stories of Annawadi residents to the page. Over those

years, she also took many photographs of a changing slum. Some of the more recent photos are on this website.

Unnati has an M.A. in sociology from the University of Mumbai and is currently helping the Indian Association for Women's Studies establish a digital archive. Previously, she provided research and editing assistance on a short documentary film, 'Do Rafeeq Ek Chai,' directed by Rafeeq Ellias, and wrote a report on madrasas in Mumbai for the Maharashtra State Minorities Commission under the supervision of Dr. Ranu Jain. An essay of her own, 'The Precinct as Workspace: Snippets from Conversations,' was published in *Zero Point Bombay: In and Around Horniman Circle*, a 2008 anthology edited by Kamala Ganesh, Usha Thakkar and Gita Chadha. Since 2009, she's also been filming the annual [Mahim fair](#) in Mumbai. Her current intent is to make a short documentary on the religious significance and raucous beauty of the fair, and how it subtly illuminates the tensions and possibilities of the city.

**Mrinmayee Ranade** was the first translator to work regularly on this project. In the first half of 2008, she joined Katherine in Annawadi and several other slums, helping to draw out individuals' stories with sensitivity and precision and remaining unflappable even in mob scenes. Her deepest sensitivity was to the domestic lives and choices of women, particularly those who were balancing work and family responsibilities, as Mrin herself does. Fittingly, she is now the editor of *Madhurima*, a weekly women's supplement for the Bhaskar Group's *Divya Marathi* newspaper.



Mrin earned her B.A. degree from the University of Mumbai and previously worked as a reporter and editor for many English- and Marathi-language publications, among them the *Indian Express*, *Navashakti*, *Maharashtra Times*, and *Times of India*. As a researcher and translator, she's assisted journalists from the *BBC*, *The National Geographic*, *The Guardian* and elsewhere. She's also taught reporting and editing at *Wilson College*, *V.G. Kelkar College*, and *Rai University*.

Three other women also helped Katherine with translation in the first half of 2008. **Kavita Mishra**, an undergraduate at the University of Mumbai, helped interview residents of several slums in between the obligations of her coursework. **Vijaya Chauhan**, a veteran educationist, spent a single day at Annawadi and a second day watching Annawadi videotapes, and in that brief time taught Katherine boatloads. **Shobha Murthy** was an equally generous teacher when she took time from her real work, running educational programs for low-income Navi Mumbai children, to help Katherine interview parents and children.

### KIRKUS REVIEW

In her debut, Pulitzer Prize-winning *New Yorker* staff writer Boo creates an intimate, unforgettable portrait of India's urban poor.

Mumbai's sparkling new airport and surrounding luxury hotels welcome visitors to the globalized, privatized, competitive India. Across the highway, on top of tons of garbage and next to a vast pool of sewage, lies the slum of Annawadi, one of many such places that house the millions of poor of Mumbai. For more than three years, Boo lived among and learned from the residents, observing their struggles and quarrels, listening to their dreams and despair, recording it all. She came away with a detailed portrait of individuals daring to aspire but too often denied a chance—their lives viewed as an embarrassment to the modernized wealthy. The author poignantly details these many lives: Abdul, a quiet buyer of recyclable trash who wished for nothing more than what he had; Zehrunisa, Abdul's mother, a Muslim matriarch among hostile Hindu neighbors; Asha, the ambitious slum leader who used her connections and body in a vain attempt to escape from Annawadi; Manju, her beautiful, intelligent daughter whose hopes lay in the new India of opportunity; Sunil, the master scavenger, a little boy who would not grow; Meena, who drank rat poison rather than become a teenage bride in a remote village; Kalu, the charming garbage thief who was murdered and left by the side of the road. Boo brilliantly brings to life the residents of Annawadi, allowing the reader to know them and admire the fierce intelligence that allows them to survive in a world not made for them.

The best book yet written on India in the throes of a brutal transition.

## PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE

### Gao Zhisheng

by Joyce Wolf

Group 22's August action for imprisoned human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng, our adopted prisoner of conscience, was a bit unusual and quite enjoyable. We joined Amnesty groups around the world to support and encourage his family by sending birthday greetings to his son Gao Tianyu, who will be ten years old on August 27.



*Letter-writing at Caltech August 13. Lucas, Noor, Joyce, Stevi, Laura, Ido. Not pictured: Alexi, who took the photo. Robert, Kai, Wen, Sylvia and Amber arrived after the photo was taken.*

The action was initiated by Amnesty's Hong Kong office and brought to our attention by AIUSA's China country specialist. It was suggested that Gao Tianyu would especially like to receive cards from children. Huge thank-you's to Group 22's kid contingent (and their parents)! Noor, James and Lucas Romans worked at home and created their own colorful card with messages and a photo of themselves. Sylvia and Amber and their mom Wen made cards and origami and wrote greetings to Tianyu in Chinese.

It's not too late to participate in this action! Visit <http://www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22/GaoPOC/GaoZhisheng.html>.

A documentary film, *Transcending Fear: The Story of Gao Zhisheng*, was screened in New York on Aug 14. The trailer includes brief clips of Tianyu and his sister.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=byJXA3mm3pQ>  
It's not on Netflix --we'll have to find out how we can get a copy to watch.

For next month, we suggest writing letters to Gao Zhisheng in prison and telling him about our action for his son's birthday. See the aigp22 website above for Gao Zhisheng's prison address.

## DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

### Billy Slagle

The Ohio executioner's needle was robbed of its kill on August 4 when Billy Slagle hanged himself. Mr. Slagle was scheduled for execution on August 9. His appeal for clemency had been denied; although, litigation in the courts continued.

Mr. Slagle was sentenced to death for the 1987 murder of Mari Anne Pope, his neighbor. The current prosecutor of Cuyahoga County supported clemency for Mr. Slagle as did one of the Ohio Supreme Court judges earlier in 1992. In 2006, a federal judge issued a strong dissent in the case because of prosecutorial misconduct that had infected the trial. One of parole board's members who voted for clemency July 16, 2013, wrote, "Slagle's age and immaturity at the time of the offense significantly mitigate his sentence in this horrible crime. Evolving standards of decency as well as medical, scientific, and sociological studies suggest that a penalty as final and irrevocable as death should not be imposed upon an individual who, like Slagle, retained the capacity for significant maturation and change at the time he or she committed the crime. Slagle's capacity for maturation and change at the time of his offense is evidenced by his positive institutional adjustment."

Mr. Slagle was 18 years old at the time of the murder. By the time of his suicide, he had spent all but eight months of his adulthood in prison. He told the clemency board he was very remorseful for what he had done and what he had put the family of Mari Anne Pope through. He also apologized to his family for what he had done to them.

### John Ferguson

"The (Supreme) Court (of the United States) held in *Ford v. Wainwright* that the Eighth Amendment prohibits the state from carrying out the death penalty on an individual who is insane, and that properly raised issues of execution-time sanity must be determined in a proceeding satisfying the minimum requirements of due process."

For 40 years, government doctors recorded paranoid delusional behavior in John Ferguson. At the time of his execution this month is

Florida, Mr. Ferguson continued to believe his was the "Prince of God" and would be resurrected after death. Not only did the Florida Supreme Court and the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals execute a mentally ill man but they also have undermined Ford v. Wainwright. Go Florida; go Governor Rick Scott, Evangelical Christian.

Although I am not a religious person, since Mr. Ferguson thought he was the "Prince of God," a quote from the book of Matthew seems appropriate: "I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!"

### Montez Spradley

Five years ago, Montez Spradley was sentenced to death. Although 10 of the 12 jurors recommended life without parole, the judge overruled the decision and sentenced him to death. Through the appeals process, flaws in the prosecution emerged. Two of the witnesses, his ex-girlfriend and a jailhouse snitch, who said Mr. Spradley had confessed to them had serious credibility problems. His ex-girlfriend had been paid more than \$10,000 in reward money after she testified against him. Earlier this year, she recanted and said he had not confessed to her.

Mr. Spradley is still in prison. He has entered an Alford plea. "According to *University of Richmond Law Review*, 'When offering an Alford plea, a defendant asserts his innocence but admits that sufficient evidence exists to convict him of the offense.'" Even though this does not establish his innocence, he will not face a death sentence and he will, one day, get to be free.

### Reggie Clemons

Reggie Clemons has not given up hope for his survival from death row. He has, however, accepted that he may, in fact, be executed. Mr. Clemons' case has been reviewed by Judge Michael Manners, the Special Master, who has submitted his findings to the Missouri Supreme Court. He finds that the prosecutors suppressed evidence. Mr. Clemons has admitted his confession to the crime of rape was secured after he was beaten by police. Warren Weeks, a bail investigator, said he remembers seeing Mr. Clemons with injuries on his face. This information was scratched out of Mr. Weeks' statement, and he said he did not remove this information. This piece of evidence has recently come to light. Mr. Weeks is quoted as saying to his wife, "I think there's something unusual

going on – nobody wants to talk about what happened to this gentlemen when he was being interviewed by the police."

In a press release, Amnesty International says it "hopes that the state's highest court will move to eliminate any possibility that Reggie Clemons might be executed."

For an online action, go to <http://takeaction.amnestyusa.org/siteapps/advocacy/ActionItem.aspx?c=6oJCLQPAJijUG&b=6645049&aid=14230>

To see an interview with Reggie Clemons, go to <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/mar/18/new-witness-reggie-clemons-injury>

### Those pesky drugs

Inability to get drugs to execute people may be the end of state sponsored murder in the United States. And then again, states may reintroduce other methods such as the electric chair. People condemned to die can choose a method other than lethal injection. Remember Gary Gilmore and the firing squad in Utah in 1977.

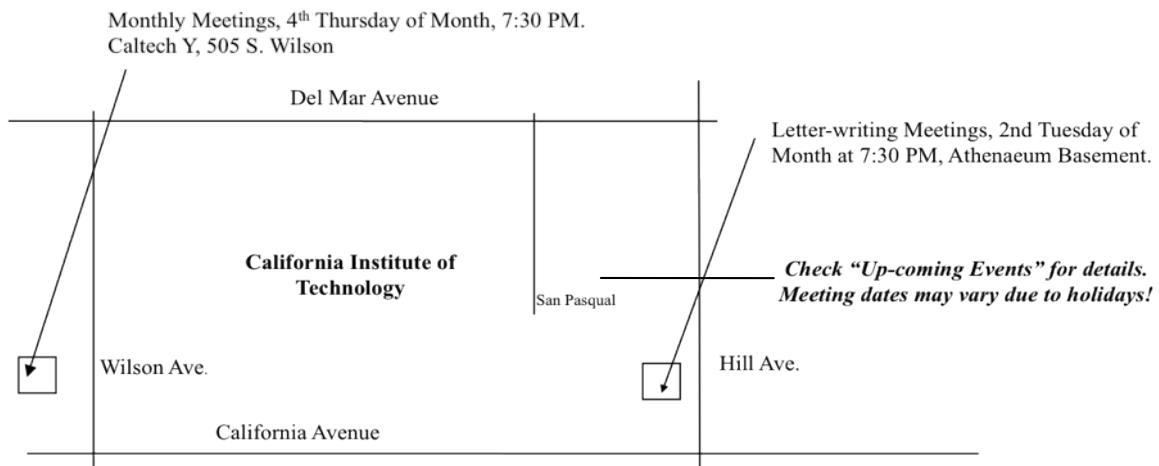
The drugs used to execute people in the United States are getting difficult to obtain. As we have seen, European and American pharmaceutical companies do not want their drugs used for executions. The prison officials of many death penalty states are finding their stash of drugs going out of date, and they are unable to refill their supplies. Over the course of the next few years, I look forward to seeing how the states' politicians address this issue.

### Executions

July		
25	Andrew Lackey*	Alabama
		3-drug lethal injection
31	Douglas Feldman	Texas
		1-drug lethal injection
August		
5	John Ferguson	Florida
		3-drug lethal injection

\*volunteer- an inmate who waived ordinary appeals that remained at the time of his or her execution

GROUP 22 MONTHLY LETTER COUNT	
UAs	22
Total	22
To add your letters to the total contact <a href="mailto:lwkamp@gmail.com">lwkamp@gmail.com</a> .	



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  
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<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.