

SUIHAA Newsletter , May 2019



Greetings Alumni! In our May newsletter we bring you:

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SUIHAA

Sydney University International House Alumni Association

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Recent events

The first De Graaff-Elms Biennial Roundtable

The Roundtable was held on Sunday 7 April, and featured Professor Mark McKenna, Patricia Garcia AO and Andrew Ford OAM. These leaders in their fields offered a fascinating glimpse into their professional careers as well as personal insights into building international understanding. Lauris Elms and Graeme de Graaff attended and were delighted with the discussion, and the great participation of alumni and current residents.

Topics on the table were in line with the objectives of the Roundtable:

- The philosophy and practice of constructive international relations
 - The pathways to peace and global citizenship
- The role of music and the arts in promoting the appreciation of cultural diversity across the world.

Patricia Garcia is a Rotary Peace Fellow and Visiting Scholar working on peace, humanitarian practice and development issues. She explained the UN's Sustainable Development Goals – based on an inspiring international agreement to work towards improving the lives of the poorest and most disadvantaged people on earth.

Andrew is an award-winning composer, writer and broadcaster. He challenged us not to think simplistically about communication. For instance: is music another language? No, he said – music communicates music. We hear it, we produce it, it flows through us, we may feel we understand it. But there is no dictionary which allows us to 'translate' music into the written word.

Mark is Professor of History, acclaimed author of historical books, papers and the remarkable Quarterly Essay *Moment of Truth: History and Australia's Future*. He gave us insights into encounters between early invaders/settlers and reflected on the very gradual appreciation of Aboriginal society which has been necessary before many of us even begin to understand the contribution Aboriginal culture could make to modern-day Australia's society and environment. Mark advocates a response to the Uluru Statement from the Heart, worthy of the consultations and negotiations among the first Australians who produced it and offered it to the nation.

IHMA Charity Night – update from Gwen Ng.

The first IHMA Charity Night for 2019 took place on Friday 12 April and was a great success. In accordance with a recently-established and heart-warming tradition the beneficiary of the funds raised at this Charity Night was the Bo Children's Hospital in Sierra Leone (founded by paediatrician and former IH resident, Dr Nuli Lemoh).

The event was very well-promoted and organised and the students participating were interested in hearing about the hospital (Nuli's wife, Margaret, who is also a former IH resident, gave an introductory talk) and very enthusiastic about giving their financial support.

The services auctioned were diverse, imaginative and fun – and resulted in some hotly-contested bidding. A variety of items donated by SUIHAA members were also auctioned.

Altogether \$930 was raised for the hospital – a wonderful result. These funds will make a significant difference to the facilities and functioning of the hospital, thereby enhancing health outcomes for the children of Bo and surrounding districts. The Bo Children's Hospital Foundation – and the community of Bo - greatly appreciates the dedication, generosity and hard work of all the organisers and participants. Thank you so much IH residents and IHMA Committee.



PHOTO: Margaret Lemoh of Bo Children's Hospital.



PHOTO: Some of the wonderful items up for auction.

Coming events

Foundation Day Dinner and Inter-Generational Reunion

IH is opening its doors to welcome back all alumni on Friday 31 May. If you recall the delicious BBQ lunch we enjoyed in mid-2017 among our 50-year celebration events, you won't want to miss this feast!

Alumni from all generations are urged to come along as we have pulled-out all stops out to make this an evening to remember. Attendance and dinner is free, and a cash bar (with limited bar tab) will be available. The event will include short speeches by representatives from each decade of the house's history.

Registration is essential. Please [RSVP here](#) by Monday 20 May.

When: Friday 31 May, 6-9pm

Where: International House, 96 City Road, Darlington NSW

Dress: Casual

International Food Fair Sat 18 May:

On behalf of the International House Members' Association we would like to invite you to the International House Food Fair. As one of the most anticipated events on the IH calendar, Food Fair brings residents together in teams to prepare and serve cuisines from countries represented in the house. Up to 10 teams will participate in the competition to vie for the title of best food, best costume and best decorations.

This year's theme is 'home away from home', with each participating team preparing a selection of dishes that represent their culture. Entry is \$10 for non-resident guests and \$5 for alumni.

When: Saturday 18 May, 6-8pm

Where: International House, 96 City Road, Darlington NSW

Dress: Casual

RSVP: Please email ih.info@sydney.edu.au confirming your attendance by Friday 10 May.

If you are able to contribute to SUIHAA's Salad Days stall, please contact info@suihaa.org.au



News items

Alumni records moved in University software upgrade

Some 15-20 years ago SUIHAA's alumni records were given into the custodianship of International House. The aim was to improve communication with alumni and make annual updates of records easier; residents pay SUIHAA membership fees automatically. The software for both the residents and alumni databases was the same. Any old written records have been digitised over time. Our understanding is that the University has upgraded this software and all IH records are being moved to a central secure server hosted by the University. Any questions about this can be directed to ih.info@sydney.edu.au .

Vice Chancellor's ideas reported in Sydney Morning Herald

The Vice Chancellor was quoted in a Herald article on 'Changing nature of life in campus' (April 27-28, News Review, page 27) which reported that: 'Recent focus groups with 700 students found many reported both social isolation and an unfulfilled desire to meet people at university who are different from them'

In response Dr Spence could have been making the case for International House...

"Learning how to disagree with [others], how to navigate difference, that's not happening as much on Australian university campuses as we think it should be" ... "So we've got a whole strategy that started this year for thinking about: how do you more deliberately ensure people encounter 'the other', for want of a better word, at university?"

Nominate an outstanding individual for a fellowship of International House

A fellow is someone who has made an outstanding contribution to International House
Nominations for fellows close 31 July. [Make your nomination online](#), or download a copy of the nomination form to print and return.

IH Future and Alumni advocacy

The Council and the House are continuing to work hard to develop good options for IH's future, and SUIHAA continues to work with them towards the same goals.

On 16 April we communicated some interesting news to Alumni. **The IH move has been postponed for a year and will not happen at the end of 2019.** That is, residents (and staff and programs) will stay where they are in 2020. This decision will give the IH community more time to work with the University to develop options for the future IH.

Thank you so much to all alumni who have already written to the Vice-Chancellor! Excerpts from some letters follow as a separate article at the end of this Newsletter, with the permission of writers, with a short version to be published in the next IH Magazine.

If you have not yet written but would like to help with SUIHAA's advocacy efforts, please write to vice.chancellor@sydney.edu.au (Dr Michael Spence) and dvc.provost@sydney.edu.au (Professor Stephen Garton).

Some information about your personal experience, and the benefits you gained from living at IH and how these carried forward into your professional and personal life would be of interest.

Please copy us into your letter or forward a copy for our records and (with your agreement) further use.

Alumni news invited

If you would like to contribute to 'people' news in the future please write a brief note (to info@suihaa.org.au), maybe with photos, for inclusion in this newsletter. Group and reunion news are welcome!

Best wishes to all IH Alumni from the SUIHAA Committee

Ros Madden, SUIHAA President; James Kane, SUIHAA Secretary and all the SUIHAA Committee: Nicole Dunn, Moe Hassan, Pippa Herden, Julia Krattli, Dominick Ng, Gwen Ng, Richard Ng, Paul Reisner, Karen Rowe-Nurse, and Lyn Woodger Grant.

With ex officio members: Jessica Sargant (IHMA Chair), Bradley Kunda (IH Residential Life Officer)

SUIHAA SPECIAL ARTICLE:

International House: International House changing lives: memories of IH

In letters to the Vice Chancellor in recent months, IH Alumni have described their personal memories of International House, its meaning in their lives, and the ingredients in its success. Excerpts from just a few of these letters provide this picture. (Compiled by Ros Madden, SUIHAA President, and published with the permission of authors.)

Dr Ros Madden, Josh Lee, Assoc. Prof. Philayrath Phongsavan, supported by other past presidents of SUIHAA, giving a total of 20 of the living alumni presidents representing 44 of the 52 years of life of International House (44 of 50 years of the alumni association):

We are writing to you directly because many alumni have written to us – Sydney University International House Alumni Association (SUIHAA) – concerned at the recent news that International House ... faces an uncertain future. For over 50 years, current student residents and International House alumni have benefitted immensely from the International House Program. Many have gone on to take their place around the world as leaders in fields such as business, law, government, science, arts and the media. They write, not only of their lasting, positive memories and stimulating experiences, but of their later appreciation of the successful International House Program which equipped them for their professional lives and, in many cases, their international and cross-cultural work.

Michael Hwang (1967)

When I moved over to International House as soon as it was open to residents, I found a whole new different world in many ways:-

- a. The integrated living facilities for members of both sexes, and both undergraduates as well as postgraduates (and even lecturers) which led to daily interactions among all residents.
- b. The purposeful mixture of Australians and non-Australians, with an active philosophy of encouraging each resident to learn more about the cultures of other residents. In particular, I learnt so much about Australia from the Aussie residents on a daily basis, about its history, its politics, its foreign policy with its neighbouring states, its slang, and its social attitudes that I began to think like an Australian, and I know that I was not unique in this respect.
- c. The feeling of integration of all the residents into one community that made us a family in a way that college life in Oxford and Wesley College never was.

That year, 1967, was the happiest and most rewarding year that I had experienced up to the point of my life, where all residents spontaneously reached out to each other on a daily basis in an environment where we were all eager to know more about other residents in terms of

their cultural background, and of course, their personal qualities.

In my particular role as President, my job was to facilitate and encourage this kind of interaction under the guidance of Graeme de Graaff, and we succeeded in creating a community within the bricks and mortar of that iconic building. One of the most brilliant pieces of design was for the dining room to be populated with round tables as opposed to the bench seats in traditional colleges. With round tables, people were easily persuaded to engage with all members of the table rather than only to the 2 or 3 people next to the diner. This was a great contribution to the ease of getting to know people and, what was more important, to genuinely care about our fellow residents regardless of nationality, religion or cultural background. It was indeed an institution unique in its time where everyone in International House knew the names of every one of the 120 plus something residents, and could tell you something about each of them. ...

You will see from this letter how passionate I am about International House and what it has done for generations of residents. Some of this passion is reflected in a talk I gave to the residents in August 2010, which I am taking the liberty of enclosing. In this speech I outlined my career as a judge and an international arbitrator, and what it means to be involved in internationalism ...

Lan (Tjhioe Lan) Wehrhahn (Nee Tan) (1968-70)

I have enjoyed many and varied performances, entertainments, national day events, cooking shows that were held at IH, but I will mention only one that was particularly important for me at that time. That was International Day, when all of us were encouraged to prepare a national dish. It was a mark of pride if your dish was completely eaten. Mine was usually Rendang, a popular Indonesian dish, but at that time largely unknown in Australia. I could never make enough to meet demand. It was here that we discovered a completely new world of tastes. I feel that so many of the discoveries we made have now percolated through the society and the great Cuisines we today take for granted owe something to the IH tradition. In my own family, thirteen year old Abigail is very keen to learn every new dish she can. Her favorite is the palm sugar sticky rice ball, which she makes for her family like an expert.

If I can summarize some of the key things that perhaps made IH so special, they would include, first and most importantly, the central dining room where most of our friendships were consolidated; the floor arrangements with their invaluable kitchens; the Rotunda which became the centre for entertainments, eating, gatherings and general fun and relaxation. Also the wonderful spot that IH occupies, near the University, Victoria Park, numerous tennis courts, and now the Seymour Centre, and with excellent transport to the city and to the Newtown and Glebe shopping districts.

Professor John Webb (1967)

... Returning from the US with my PhD from California Institute of Technology (Caltech) I settled in Perth at the then newly established university, Murdoch University. The International House influence persisted in maintaining my curiosity about the people and cultures of our region. Living in Perth provided the opportunity to develop collaborative research networks in SEAsia, with Perth being so close in both distance and time, to SEAsia. For those networks I received the Medal of the Order of Australia in 1996 but the seeds for that were sown by my year in International House.

The internationalisation of International House living encouraged me further, into long-term consultancy with UNESCO Paris and a diplomatic appointment as Counsellor (Education, Science and Training) in the Australian High Commission in New Delhi (2005-2008). I would not have been ready for these opportunities without that year in International House. Although the world in 2019 is quite a different place compared to 1967, the social capital created by living together, in an international community, remains invaluable. I am convinced that such life experiences are transformative, and I hope that many more students will continue to have such an opportunity. As our global world fractures into competing nationalistic narratives, the value of International House is only increased.

Larry Kwok (1978-80)

The International House serves the purpose of a meeting place for students of different nationalities. Everyone who appreciates this purpose would treasure the House. Students staying at the International House come from a diverse background of six continents. This is an exceedingly unique place to practice multiculturalism. The IH experience benefits students in many ways, whether for personal growth, gaining exposure, nurturing a spirit of common humanity among us or preparing for the business world after graduation. I am certainly a beneficiary of the International House legacy. My IH experience and cross-cultural interactions prove to be greatly relevant and helpful in my leadership roles as Managing Partner, Greater China of Andersen Legal and also, Managing Partner, Mainland China and Hong Kong of Mallesons Stephen Jacques (now known as King & Wood Mallesons).

Gwen Ng (1969)

A residence like International House provides an opportunity for students from all over the world to develop life-long friendships and an understanding of each other's cultures. Many of these students go on to become leaders of countries, companies and organisations, with their enlightening student experience at IH undoubtedly informing their future decision-making (especially relevant in this global age where international understanding and cultural tolerance are so desperately needed).

The daily sharing of meals at the round tables in the IH dining room provides an ideal forum for wide-ranging discussions/debates and the exchange of ideas. It also instils the feeling of 'family' among the hugely diverse community of residents. The importance of a common dining room in International House, cannot be overstated.

The current, extensive IH programme of talks, seminars, celebrations and concerts is enhanced by most of these events being held in the beautiful Rotunda, designed by renowned

architect, Walter Bunning, and recently assessed as being of highly significant heritage value. The Rotunda is the physical heart of IH and must be preserved.

My husband, a Colombo Plan Scholar from Singapore, and I (from a conservative family in suburban Sydney) met at IH, Sydney University, and both feel strongly that our stay at IH was a life-changing, inspiring, fabulous experience which opened our minds to a world of ideas, friendships and opportunities.

Dr Peter Shaver (1967-68)

The next few paragraphs may give an idea of what International House has meant to me, a Canadian who came to Sydney to do a PhD in astrophysics in 1966 when Australia was tops in radio astronomy. First and foremost for me, I met my Australian wife Jenefer at IH; she was a “mature undergraduate” studying medicine. We had many IH friends from all over the world, and that was a learning experience in itself. A memorable discussion involving several nationalities including Israeli and Egyptian took place over dinner at the time of the Six-Day War in 1967. I had the ‘opportunity’ to be the moderator in a heated debate between Australian Vietnam-war hawks and doves. There were evening musical and theatrical events, and picnics involving many nationalities. It was a great time, and a fantastic cultural learning experience.

My wife and I then travelled widely – overland to Europe, overland Cairo to Capetown, the Trans-Siberian Railroad, and eventually to Bangalore, India, where I did research in physics and Jenefer worked for Indian villagers at a mission hospital for a year. We then went to Europe - The Netherlands, Switzerland, and then Munich where I became a senior scientist at the European Southern Observatory (ESO), an intergovernmental research organization, now involving 16 countries (Australia has just become a partner, on a 10-year track to membership). The experience of working in close collaboration with such talented scientists and engineers from so many countries and cultures was inspiring. Our two children attended an International School in Munich, and they share our enthusiasm for the global community.

In science, countries that are the most open to scientists from other countries and international collaborations have the greatest impact. Indeed, this openness is more closely linked to scientific impact than is the amount a country spends on R & D, and scientists that are internationally mobile have significantly higher citation rates than scientists that are not. Today international projects and collaborations account for over 20% of global spending on scientific research, and up to 50% in some countries. In the U.S. over 60% of the postdocs come from overseas, as did over a third of all U.S.-based Nobel science laureates. European countries rank high in both openness and scientific impact, and the European Union has established the European Research Area to further enhance them; the EU as a bloc is now a strong performer. Countries that turn their backs on scientific mobility and international collaboration do so at their peril. International House introduced us to the cultures and peoples of the world, and we (and our children) are forever grateful. It has enriched our lives and made us aware of possibilities we may never have dreamt of.

Dr Dennis Schatz (1969-70)

Before my stay at International House, I lived most of my life in an internationally isolated part of the United States. It was during the Vietnam War and clearly the United States could do no wrong. My time at International House opened my eyes, my mind and my heart to other cultures' traditions, lifestyles and living conditions. This enlightened understanding of the world has influenced my moral compass and intellectual endeavors ever since.

This resulted in my using my career in science education to build relationships between the US and other cultures, including Australia, China, India, Finland and the UK. As much as sharing science and science education concepts, a major goal has always been to build a stronger personal and cultural relationship between the countries and the people.

Nora Vitz Harrison (1978)

I lived in International House in 1978 as a Rotary graduate fellow from the United States. My collection of friends came from every corner of the globe. Each one of us could provide personal perspective to the headlines, which we did over meals in the cafeteria. A friend from Lebanon worried that the Lebanese civil war would prevent his return. A Jamaican shared thoughts on the Green Bay massacre. An Argentine led us in a cheer when his team won the FIFA World Cup.

Over a long weekend, a group of us (from Great Britain, Germany, Japan, United States, and Australia) went backpacking in the Royal National Park. We sang campfire songs and marveled that our fathers had tried to kill each other during World War II.

Hannah Yiu (1974, 1976)

IH offered companionship of a mature and multi-cultural nature; casual yet intellectually challenging; fun without the straitjackets of patronising regulations or condescending rituals. I, who until then associated mostly with Asian students outside the University, integrated instantly into the IH community and met my husband there (Greg Houseman). Our younger son Alexander Houseman also returned to Sydney University from UK to become a resident in IH, 34 years after we did.

Our family has always practised the cultural curiosities & sensitivities we were introduced from our student days in IH – all these have underscored my own career (I was amongst the first, in early 1980s, to work with Australian food writers and Asian food manufacturers to introduce/promote authentic Asian food products into mainstream supermarkets such as Coles, Woolworths and then then Franklins). My husband Greg Houseman has, in his career in Australia and in UK, mentored many Australian as well as Asian students who have found publishing their research results 'linguistically challenging'. Of Greg's former Asian students there are now eminent scientists and academics in their own rights in UK and various parts of Europe. Alex's start-up business in coconut cream ice cream in Australia was inspired and encouraged in part by his awareness of widespread lactose intolerance amongst Asian students and consumers in Australia.

Our own family tradition is not unique amongst our IH peers & their off springs – many of whom we stayed in touch and watched with awe and respect as they further the best of our multi-culturalism in Australia. We are confident that the enlightened tradition of IH will continue to flourish and be supportive of future generations of IH residents once IH Council and the University can conduct further dialogue.

We plan and remain hopeful to support our grandchildren to become resident of IH

Dr James Kane, Dr Stephanie Wong and 11 other recent alumni (2005-17)

... Though its many successes are comparatively unheralded, IH has quietly gone about its business of providing a comfortable, welcoming, and, in many cases, life-changing home away from home for both undergraduate and postgraduate students from Australia and around the world. As (the Vice Chancellor) noted when opening the IH Roundtable in 2017 as part of the 50 th anniversary celebrations, ‘bringing people together across boundaries of difference’ is fundamentally important. IH has always succeeded at this.

Great generosity of spirit is not only a defining quality of IH, but one of the foundations that allowed it to exist in the first place. Little more than an idea in the mid-1950s, the IH that opened its doors in 1967 was a labour of love. It would never have seen the light of day without the tireless efforts of thousands of dedicated students, politicians (both Australian and foreign), University staff, architects, builders, and charitable citizens (spearheaded by the enormously successful Rotary fundraising campaign) who grasped the value of promoting international understanding and friendship by making IH a reality. Fortunately, preserving that reality no longer requires such a massive undertaking. It is in the University’s hands.