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RCH alumni newsletter

June 2018

Great white pelicans in Namibia Photo by Gigi Williams



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The 2018 RCH Alumni Executive

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Songs of exile, exodus and freedom

Several recent events have led me to reflect on the continuing struggle for human rights and freedom against discrimination, oppression and disaster.

The first of these events was the Alumni symposium in conjunction with Children's Rights International on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. A report on this appears elsewhere in the newsletter.

The symposium examined the background to the development of the convention, the relationship and differences between rights and ethics, and some specific examples of the difficulties encountered in implementing human rights in paediatric practice. CRI plans further medico-legal symposia on children's rights and the Alumni will continue to be a partner.

The central idea of human rights was expressed in the US Declaration of Independence in 1776. It referred to "self-evident truths" – that all men are created equal, they have inalienable rights, and among them "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness".

In January 1941, Franklin Roosevelt proposed four fundamental freedoms that all people everywhere ought to enjoy—freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want and freedom from fear

These four freedoms became the basis for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed by the UN in 1948. Much later, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted as one of several flowing from it. The Declaration was a response to "the disregard and contempt for human rights.....and the barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind."

Sadly, in too many places and in too many ways, outrageous and barbarous acts continue, and even in this lucky country there is still much to do.

The Port Fairy Folk festival which Lorraine and I greatly enjoyed was the second of these events. Situated as it is in Western Victoria, Port Fairy is in the heartland of Irish settlement in Australia. Place names in the surrounding area are redolent of Ireland.



A highlight was the presentation of "Exile - songs and tales of Irish Australia. Oppression and famine devastated Ireland in the early 19th century. "The famine killed everything". Farming, infrastructure the economy and the culture were decimated. Many people died, childhood mortality was enormous and millions left - to the USA, Australia and elsewhere. In the long decades that followed, sectarian battles continued to bedevil Ireland and echoes of "the Troubles" persist today.

But the story of the exiles, told in song and dance is inspirational. Their contribution to the New Worlds they inhabited massively influenced the character of their adopted countries. They were at the forefront in the struggle for social justice and human rights. In Australia, think Peter Lalor and the Eureka stockade, folk hero Ned Kelly (and his sentencing judge Redmond Barry) and the development of the labour movement. They were central to the formation of the ALP, the conscription battle and the Labour party split in the 1950s. Prime ministers like Chifley, Curtin and Keating changed the direction of the nation. Keating's Redfern address was a seminal event in the struggle for indigenous recognition.

Folk Music often tells the story of the struggle for human rights. Geoffrey Robertson QC elegantly and eloquently told of the folk music background and influence to his long career as an advocate for human rights.

Another inspirational concert at Port Fairy was by Gina Williams, an indigenous WA woman of the Nungar nation. She is one of only 400 Nungar language speakers, and it took her 10 years to acquire the language. She has overcome many trials in her life to become a leader and advocate for her people and 2018 WA woman of the year. And to top it off, she is a great singer, composer and story teller.

Hugo Gold, President, RCH Alumni

The third event took place a week later. This was a presentation in jazz, song, dance and narration entitled "Yid". It celebrated the survival of Yiddish culture and language against all the odds of the depredations, persecutions and genocide of the last 150 years. In story and song, it told of love of life and the determination to survive, to dance, laugh and cry and above all to love. Like the Irish, the Yiddish speaking immigrants to the USA and Australia made major contributions to movements promoting human rights and freedom for all.

The last event and perhaps the most seminal is the Passover Seder. It tells of the Exodus from Egypt and is the archetypal liberation story. Its demand "Let my people go!" has given hope to downtrodden people everywhere over a very long time.

We celebrate it with story-telling, songs and food - and we invite all those who are hungry and lonely to join us, because human rights and freedom belong to everyone.



"Friends". Photo by Jim Wilkinson



Sir Hubert Wilkins with his wife, Lady Suzanne.

How a girl from Walhalla in the hills of Gippsland became the wife of a great Australian explorer: Hubert Wilkins

Susan Evans was a girl from Walhalla, an old mining town in the Gippsland hills north of Moe, who went on to become an actress and singer on Broadway in New York, where she became known as Suzanne Bennett.

The biography of Hubert Wilkins, The Last Great Explorer, recounts the tales of his incredible, charmed life. He was a grandson of the first white boy born in South Australia. His family farmed north of the Gaydor line, beyond which the climate was almost too dry to farm. From a young age these conditions led him to think of establishing a series of weather stations in the Antarctic to help provide better weather forecasting.

The Wilkins family eventually moved to Adelaide, where Hubert trained in engineering as well as music, and took courses at the School of Mines. Opportunities arose which led to his interest in photography and flying. He was a War photographer on the Western Front in the First World War. He believed that the days of land exploration were over by the late 1920s and that future exploration would be conducted by air and in submarines. He was the first person to fly across the Arctic in 1928 from Alaska to Spitzbergen. He and his pilot were fêted like heroes in Berlin, Paris and London where he was knighted by King George V. He then sailed for New York for more celebrations. When the ship was approaching New York, a smaller boat was sent out to bring him ashore more quickly. As he was Australian it was decided to find

an Australian to join the welcoming party. This was Suzanne Bennett from Walhalla. Although Wilkins ignored her at first, he eventually spoke to her. They became friends and eventually got married. She became Lady Wilkins. They spent relatively little time each year together as they pursued their interests in exploration and on the stage.

Wilkins' further achievements as an explorer included being the first person to take a submarine under the Arctic ice and the first person to fly over part of Antarctica – the Antarctic Peninsula from Deception Island which is volcanic.

Following their deaths, the ashes of both Hubert and Suzanne were dispersed at the North Pole.

By Kester Brown AM



Businessman, philanthropist and friend of The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne:

Mr Barry Novy OAM

By Christine Unsworth AM

Businessman, philanthropist and passionate supporter of the Royal Children's Hospital, Barry Novy was a Director on the Board of Management of the Royal Children's Hospital from 2001 – 2008. During his tenure he served on the Finance, Investment, Audit and Risk Committee and Chaired the Primary Care and Population Health Committee.

However his interest and involvement in the RCH did not start there. Planning to emigrate from Chicago to Melbourne in 1975 with a young wife and daughter, Barry was told by their family doctor that his daughter will be fine, "Melbourne has the great Children's Hospital."

At home in the USA, Barry had a close involvement with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and fittingly chose to make a connection with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. A meeting with Professor George Werther in that forum set up a relationship with the Royal Children's Hospital that has endured to this day. George spoke about the need for funding to establish a diabetic camp for his patients. Without hesitation Barry set to work and formed the Diabetic Camp Auxiliary – a group that subsequently raised the required funds to cover the budget shortfall and secure a camp nurse.

His business expertise and qualifications, his integrity, and his knowledge of the hospital led Barry to be appointed in 1992 as the Real Estate Property Manager and Consultant to the Royal Children's Hospital and in due course to the RCH Foundation.

He currently holds the position of Chair of the RCH 1000 and Chair of the Children's Bioethics Centre Development Board.

He was Chair of the Royal Children's Hospital Foundation for 7 years and Chair of the Centre for Hormone Research for 3 years.

Barry was a Founding member of the Grattan Institute and he is the Australian Chair and Alumni Liaison for the Kellogg Graduate School of Management, Northwestern University, where he gained his MBA.

Significant Victorian Government appointments Barry has held have included:

• Woman's and Children's Healthcare Network, Estimate of Land value at Highest and Best Use, Royal Women's Site

- Multinet Gas (Gas & Fuel Corp) Highest and Best Use Review (Hawthorn Gasometer Site)
- Tricontinental Corp (State Bank of Victoria) Property Review and Strategic Marketing of Property.

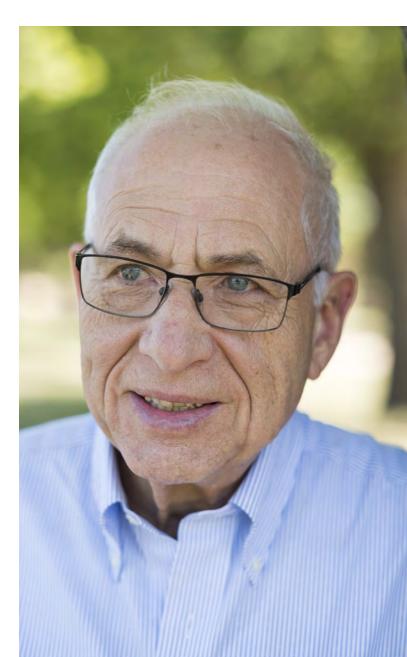
He is a Fellow of:

- Real Estate Institute of Victoria
- Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia
- American Institute of Certified Public Accounts

Named Victorian Father of the Year in 2002, Barry was also honoured to receive a Medal in the Order of Australia in the Queen's Birthday Honours in 2011.

Barry and his wife Sue Selwyn both have a strong involvement with the hospital contributing significantly through the Children's Bioethics Centre and the RCH 1000. In 2007, Barry established an endowment in memory of his late wife Helen, to be used by the Volunteer Department for future development of this service.

He deems it an honour to be accepted as a part of the Royal Children's Hospital community, and one of the most rewarding experiences one could have. Barry Novy is indeed a generous and dedicated supporter of our hospital.



Comments on the November 2017 issue of the RCH Alumni Newsletter

By Kester Brown AM

Garry Warne should be congratulated for establishing the Newsletter.

Bronwyn Hewitt's article on Josef Szczepanski is the result of some excellent investigative research. She consulted me at the beginning but I knew little of his background except that he was one of the first hospital photographers and that I had attended his outstanding presentation on Copernicus. He also filmed my first movie in 1972 which must have been one of the earliest produced at RCH. It was entitled "Gamma hydroxybutyrate anaesthesia for microlaryngeal surgery for papilloma in children" and came nicely packaged in a blue box. It was filmed on 16mm Kodak film. Joe was meticulous when taking the shots. He also devised a way of taking images showing movements of the larynx without the aid of modern micro laryngoscopes. It was made shortly after the advent of the use of microscopes in surgery. The 1970s also saw the advent of various endoscopes which revolutionized surgery.

The first showing of this film was at my home. Joe kindly presented me with this bottle of Polish gooseberry wine (pictured right). It was so beautifully done up that I could never bring myself to open it so it remains unopened 44 years later!

A rather amusing incident occurred in Malaysia where I was teaching under the Colombo Plan. I had been sent to Penang, which was a duty free port, to lecture. On my return to Kuala Lumpur we had to go through customs. A customs man found my movie in my bag. "Ah" he said with delight, "a blue movie!" He then began to harass me, despite my plea that it was used in a medical lecture, until I threatened to contact the Australian Embassy, under whose auspices I was travelling. He then backed off and did not get the bribe he was obviously hoping

Gamma hydroxybutyrate had been introduced by Laborit in Paris in 1960 as a basal intravenous anaesthetic. It is a simple compound structurally close to betahydroxybutyrate in the Krebs cycle. Induction was slow, thought to be due to a transformation to an active compound gammabutyrolactone. It caused bradycardia and slow, deep respiration which made it ideal for viewing the larynx, It was long acting (2-3 hours). (One registrar added humour to his talk on the drug by saying that one of my patients slept for 22 hours - not true). This was useful when Clive Pyman, our Senior ENT surgeon, was extracting bronchial foreign bodies because he was a very slow operator.

How could we shorten its action? Pre-treatment with betahyroxybutyrate shortened its action so we decided to try reversal with it. The pharmacy made some up and we went to the Animal Lab to seek a small animal which would not use too much of our precious drug. We gave a rabbit a total of ten times our usual dose and all that happened was it drooped its ears and then rapidly elevated them ten minutes later when some lettuce was offered. A classic example of species variation mentioned by Alan Duncan.

Researchers in Dunedin who were also doing a trial were more fortunate. They found that sleep time was shortened by administering physostigmine. This is very important information because this drug is now a street drug and overdosage with respiratory insufficiency sometimes occurs.

I met Laborit in 1974. He was a dynamic French exnaval surgeon who became a very active research

biochemist /pharmacologist. He introduced both gammahydroxybutyrate and chlorpromazine in his effort to reduce the stress response to surgery. The latter was the first of the phenothiazines and later, the closely related tricyclic andtidepressants – a large part of psychopharmacology.

Geoff Mullins was always a great entertainer. He became Director of Intensive Care but then went to Toronto to join Geoff Barker, another RCH Director of ICU who went on to hold a similar position at HSC in Toronto and later Professor of Critical Care at the University of Toronto. Mulllins' idea for calming children down was certainly novel. His second story about receiving a kiss from his Downs patient brought back the memory of a little girl I anaesthetized in Toronto in 1965. I carried her into theatre and put her on the table. She asked for a story so I found a little book and

read it to her. Then she said "Kiss?". As it was obviously her good night routine I gave her a kiss and she went to sleep very peacefully!





Swansongs

Retirement after decades of being a Unit Head with administrative, teaching, clinical and research responsibilities, within a tertiary teaching hospital, even though marked by the "Swansong" of adulating retirement dinners, with farewell speeches and gifts, is apt to leave a daunting, dissatisfying and depressing void. But it doesn't need to be like that!

In recent years, both my husband, Elsdon Storey and I have stood down from such positions, into semi-retirement, my husband due to chronic health issues, and myself, as I had decided to take up what I thought would be a less demanding, predominantly teaching job at a smaller hospital, to enable me to enjoy a last opportunity of focussing more on one of my major passions, singing.

We have since discovered the exhilarating experience of performing in opera. We would never had experienced this had we still been in our previous demanding positions. Classical singing has always been a big part of our lives, starting with when Elsdon and I first befriended each other each other over a lab bench during histology "prac" in second year medicine at Melbourne University 44 years ago! Whilst we were peering down microscopes and sketching microscopic features of various body tissues, we discovered that we both loved classical music generally and singing in particular. Elsdon had won a part-time vocal scholarship to the Melba Conservatorium where he was having singing lessons, and he arranged for me to have singing lessons there also. Over the ensuing years, Elsdon had sung from time to time in various opera workshops, we had sung in some choirs and performed occasional solos and duets together. However, with our time constraints, I did not ever imagine that we would some day sing together on the operatic stage!

Yet the opportunity came to us last year when Melbourne Opera was looking for additional classically trained singers to swell their chorus for the 60 or so strong chorus required for the Richard Wagner's epic opera "Lohengrin". Members of this 60 voice chorus were unpaid, however the soloists



By Christine Rodda

were all internationally acclaimed singers with a professional production team. Having said that the chorus was unpaid, many were professional musicians who felt privileged to sing in this glorious work, fully staged and accompanied by a 70 piece orchestra, and which has not been performed in Melbourne for 15 years. We started rehearsals around the beginning of May and opening night was 7th August in the beautiful Regent theatre in Collins Street, with our fourth and last performance on the 12th August in the Robert Blackwood Hall at Monash University. We are pictured above, with me as one of the lavender clad nuns and Elsdon as a sword carrying Brabantine nobleman. The hero Lohengrin is centre stage in the white cape. From the outset we discovered the incredible demands of even being a chorus member in an opera. Having a suitable voice and sound technique was assumed and essential, but that was just the beginning. The discipline of memorising the choral segments, turning up to all the rehearsals on time, the teamwork with fellow chorus members and the choreography, were all very demanding,

but I felt that our medical training in many ways prepared us well for this aspect of operatic performance, with regard to the professionalism required. Although Elsdon's chronic illness made it more tiring with all the demands on stage and learning the vast tracts of men's chorus that needed to be memorised in German, he felt an enormous sense of satisfaction having done it! Fortunately there was less to be memorised for the women's chorus, as I really struggled to learn my part, fitting it in with an almost full-time day job. However, I will always remember the feeling I had at the last performance at Robert Blackwood Hall, which has wonderful acoustics on stage, I finally felt really comfortable with all the women's chorus, and I remember feeling absolutely exhilarated by the transcending music and the whole experience, I felt that could keep singing in this opera for ever!!!

However, one of the physical limitations I had was that I had an ankle arthrodesis performed some years ago, which made negotiating the risers on stage quite challenging. As one of the nuns, we each had to develop our own "character" so I decided to put my disability into my "character" as a somewhat disabled, concerned and kindly old nun, with other nuns helping me on the risers as necessary, which apparently seemed to work. Others contending with physical disability, was the oldest chorus member that I was aware of. At aged 80 years old, he had been singing in opera choruses for decades. He used a single walking stick (seemingly as a "prop" but actually also truly steadied him) for his on stage character as an elderly Brabantine, It was clear that he loved every minute of it on stage.

For those of you who aren't Wagner fans (and I am aware of a number!!), the reference to "Swansong" is also to the opera of Lohengrin itself. The story of Lohengrin is set in the 10th century and is based on various German myths and legends. The character of Lohengrin is a pure and divine-like saviour to the Brabantines, who are under threat of war. He arrives in the first act on a Swan boat. This opera really captured the imaginations of 19th century opera-goers and Swan boats became features of public gardens at the time, such as the one which still exists today in the Boston Public Gardens. The

"Wedding March" which opens the 3rd Act, became a widely popular organ voluntary for weddings (colloquially referred to in Engilsh as "Here comes the bride"), in the latter half of the 19th century and much of the 20th century.

Lohengrin was also the first Wagnerian opera to be performed in Australia in Melbourne's Prince of Wales Opera House in Bourke St, Melbourne (no longer in existence) with the opening night on 18th August 1877, almost 140 years to the day before Melbourne Opera's performances. This original Melbourne performance had a 40 piece orchestra, a 100 voice chorus and ran for 19 performances, but at an enormous cost financially to and emotionally on the inspired impresario William Lyster who made it all possible, although sadly, such were the demands of this stellar achievement, he never guite recovered! In a small way, Elsdon and I could relate to this. Neither of us had ever sung in a full length (4 hours in this case!) opera before, and with Elsdon's health issues and still working part-time, and my almost full-time job, it was a huge undertaking, but an unforgettably fabulous experience and worth every moment! Despite the challenges of having a chronic illness, Lohengrin was no operatic swansong for Elsdon either, as earlier this year he sang in the male chorus of Melbourne Opera's "Tristan and Isolde" performed at the Palais Theatre, and he hopes to continue to sing in the male chorus with Melbourne Opera from time to time. For me with my current workload, I will just continue to keep my voice "ticking along" confining myself to the church choir at our parish church of St Mary's Anglican Church, North Melbourne, and occasionally with other choirs, such as the Cathedral Singers at St Paul's Cathedral and the Melbourne Bach Choir, but hoping that within the next few years or so I might once again have an opportunity to sing in the Melbourne Opera women's chorus.

In conclusion, why have I wanted to share this story? We have several medical colleagues who sing on stage, have joined choirs and/or have taken up singing lessons as their clinical demands have eased or ceased in complete retirement. We universally find singing beautiful music with a group, wonderfully uplifting and restorative!

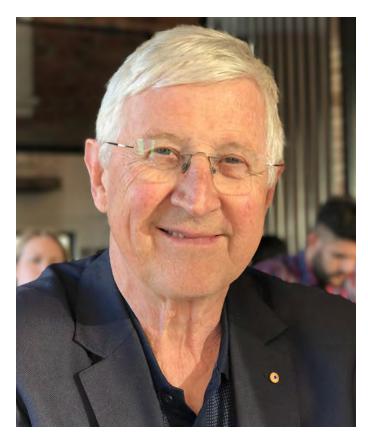
Child health, children's rights and the law.

A seminar series on children's rights under the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child

The idea for this series originated at a meeting of the board of Children's Rights International (CRI; www.childjustice.org), of which I am a member and which is chaired by former Chief Justice of the Family Court, The Hon. Alastair Nicholson AO RFD QC. There are two other former judges on the board, some additional lawyers and several members from other professions. We wanted to establish a forum where members of the medical and legal professions would come together to discuss children's rights and to explore the many areas in which the interests of the two professions overlap. To provide structure, we proposed that we would base the meetings on the various clauses of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Our aim was to educate and stimulate discussion in a scholarly atmosphere, assisted by respected, well-informed speakers. It flowed naturally that CRI would invite the RCH Alumni to collaborate in hosting the series, and that meetings would then alternate between RCH, where the Alumni would be hosts and the University of Melbourne Law School, where CRI would be the host organisation. We further invited Dr Linny Phuong, Founder and Chair of the Water Well Project and a Fellow in Infectious Diseases at RCH, to be a member of the organising committee because of her extensive connections with young doctors.

The first meeting in the series took place in the RCH Foundation on the evening of Tuesday 27 February and was chaired by Alumni President, Dr Hugo Gold. This was intended to provide an overview of the UN Convention and the extent to which it is implemented in Australia. The two key speakers were Professor John Tobin, Francine V McNiff Professor in Human Rights Law at the University of Melbourne and Dr Georgia Paxton, Head of Immigrant Health and a consultant paediatrician at RCH. They each spoke for about 15 minutes and were then joined by two panellists, Associate Professor Lynn Gillam, Academic Head, Children's Bioethics Centre, and Alastair Nicholson, Chair of CRI.

Professor Tobin spoke about the background to the Convention and what it was intended to achieve. He challenged the audience to identify ways in which their day to day practice was influenced by the Convention.



By Prof. Garry Warne AM

Georgia Paxton spoke about her experience in Immigrant Health and her talk highlighted the many ways in which immigrants are let down in this country because their complex situations are not easily dealt with by the bureaucracy and as a result, their rights are not always protected.

Lynn Gillam surprised some members of the audience by saying that she had difficulty with "rights talk" because as an ethicist and philosopher, she could always see complex situations in a more nuanced way and the Convention is expressed in more black and white terms.

Alastair Nicholson spoke about CRI and its work to defend the rights of children who encounter law enforcement agencies, the judiciary and the prison system in Cambodia.

The meeting attracted a capacity audience of nearly 70 lawyers and doctors (young and old) and provided the opportunity for them to socialise over drinks and light refreshments both before and after the seminar.

The next meeting in the series will be held at the University of Melbourne Law School at a date in June still to be fixed. This meeting will have a theme associated with one or more sections of the Convention. The series will be on-going and at least two more meetings will be held this year.

Amundsen's South Pole Flag

I read with great interest in the National Library of Australia Magazine of September 2010 about the photographs of Amundsen's party when they were the first to reach the South Pole on 15th December 1911. They were developed and printed by E.W. Searle in March 1912 in Hobart where they stopped on their return from Antarctica. They stayed at Hadley's Orient Hotel where the best suite is now named after Amundsen. Another historic event took place at Hadley's Hotel in January 1934 – the founding of the Australian Society of Anaesthetists.

Searle kept copies of some prints for his own album. This album had recently been donated to the National Library in Canberra. On a recent visit to Canberra I had the privilege to view these and was given permission to photograph them as they were now out of copyright restrictions. The South Pole print is thought to be the only known original print of the photograph because the flag is not flying out as in all Norwegian prints.

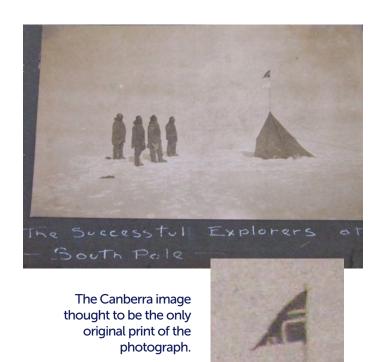
I gave a copy of the page to an old friend who had been at Macquarie Island in 1950 and at Mawson in 1954. He passed this on to another Antarctic friend who lent me his book "The Amundsen Photographs", edited and introduced by Roland Huntford and published in 1987 by Hodder & Staughton. This book is based on Amundsen's lecture slides which were found in a Horlick's Malted Milk Tablets box in the attic of a relative's house in Norway in the early 1980s.

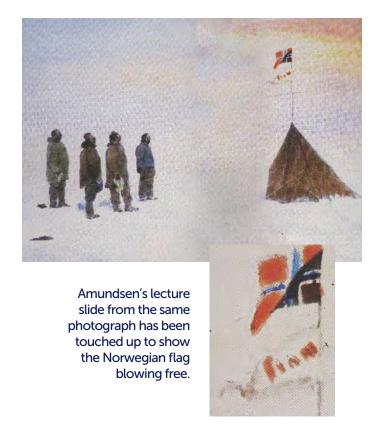
The fascinating point is that the photograph taken by Olav Bjaaland, before the party (Roald Amundsen, Helmer Hansen, Oscar Wisting and Sverre Hassel) left the South Pole, has been used in the slide but the flag was coloured manually and the Fram Flag below it was also marked in red, possibly with a crayon. The dark line seen in Amundsen's slide is the same as that caused by folding of the flag in the original print in Canberra.

When I photographed the two images and enlarged the flags it became apparent that the flag on Amundsen's slide had been drawn, possibly with a crayon, and not photographically manipulated. This can be seen on the attached prints.

The other interesting point which comes out in Huntford's book is that Amundsen did take photographs but his camera was damaged before they reached the Pole, so they had to rely on those taken by Olav Bjaaland.

By Kester Brown AM













ASYLUM SEEKERS AND THEIR CHILDREN MATTER

Tues 19th June 2018 6:00-7:30pm

Room GO8, Law School, University of Melbourne, 185 Pelham St, Carlton VIC 3053

A seminar on Medico Legal aspects of Australia's Asylum Seeker Policies in light of Australia's obligations under relevant international instruments including the Refugee Convention and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Keynote Speakers:

- Professor Erika Feller
 Former Assistant High
 Commissioner (Protection),
 one of the four top
 management positions of the
 UN High Commission for
 Refugees, carrying the United
 Nations Grade of Assistant
 Secretary General, January
 2005 to April 2013, Vice Chancellor's Fellow, University
 of Melbourne, 2013
- Professor David Isaacs
 Clinical Professor-Paediatric
 Infectious Diseases, Children's
 Hospital, Westmead and
 University of Sydney; Editor in
 Chief-Journal of Paediatrics
 and Child Health

Chair:

 Professor John Tobin Law School- University of Melbourne

Commentators:

- Ms Katie Robertson
 Senior Associate, Social
 Justice Practice-Maurice
 Blackburn Lawyers
- Dr Kudzai Kanhutu Infectious Diseases consultant- Royal Melbourne Hospital Refugee Clinic

Presented by Children's Rights International and Royal Children's Hospital Alumni