



Welcome to issue no. 8

NEW on the website [Schoolinsight](#):

- New photos of Wellington's Art in Action,
- New South Africa page with a student's account of photographing in a township,
- Also see current information on Distance Learning courses, and catch up on back issues.
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Please feel free to forward this to anyone who you think would appreciate it. Anyone can subscribe using the link at the bottom of the page. If you're having any trouble viewing, click on View Web Version above.

With very best wishes, Christine Lambie



Ron Leaton is one of only 4 remaining survivors of the Holocaust living in London. Here he writes something of his life journey.

Beauty is truth

Ron Leaton, London

A burning synagogue was the first sign of the evil in our midst, but there was worse to come.

I had been born in Poland a few years earlier, the only child of Jewish parents. My childhood in Wieliczka, a small town on the outskirts of Krakow, was very comfortable.

All that changed when Poland was invaded by Germany on 1st September 1939. Immediately my parents arranged for us to leave but the German troops caught up with us within days forcing us to return. At Mielec, our overnight resting place - we saw the burning synagogue with people inside it, and when we got back home, Kasia, our home help, told us that 32 Jewish men had been gathered

together and executed.

Endurance in Krakow

For three years we lived in fear. Then a day came, 27th August 1942, which is ingrained in my mind, when my mother was taken 'for work'. As if anticipating her fate, she had written a note for me, in which she said, 'Before you undertake anything of importance in life, consider what I would have thought about it and you'll be all right!' This I have always done. My father and I were soon confined in Krakow ghetto, being marched to and from 12-hour shifts in a cable factory, although I was still only a child.

Inhumanity of War

In August 1944, when the Russian Front was approaching Krakow, along with others, my father and I were loaded onto a goods train, about 70 men per wagon in 30° C. Two hours later we reached a railway siding at Auschwitz where we were to undergo selection but by chance, the SS were having to deal with huge numbers of transportees arriving from Hungary and had no time for us. From a tiny window, we could see them throwing little children on to a bonfire because the crematorium could not cope; they were burnt alive. After 3-4 days our train reached Mauthausen where I was given the number 86833. I was set to work in a factory making German tanks at St.Valentin, a sub-camp. The guards were often cruel and food was meagre, consequently many died from beatings or hunger. In fact my father's agonising death in December 1944 was the result of pneumonia brought on by abuse at the hands of an SS officer.

Beauty is truth

I existed from day to day. My body was skin and bone after almost three years of starvation, but I remember one day in particular when silently standing huddled with a group of prisoners. I happened to look up and see beautiful mountains in the distance, covered in snow, and forests also covered in snow, all in beautiful sunshine (the temp was at least -20C). Looking, I realised that irrespective of our pathetic personal state, this is the truth, the true beauty of nature which exists permanently! I know now that this insight allowed me to survive the trauma.

Liberation

During the Allied bombing of April 1945, the tank factory was obliterated and we sheltered in deep cellars. It was then that I contracted diarrhoea and was moved to the camp hospital where an elderly Polish doctor gave me the last opium he had. He saved my life. The American tanks arrived on 8th May 1945, bringing Liberation. I was fifteen years old.

My recovery began in a makeshift American hospital with two days of pure drinking water to rinse my digestive system, after which my food intake was slowly increased. From a displaced persons camp, travelling through Italy, nearly 2 years later, I reached the UK. Here I studied for a degree (BSc Eng.) and eventually went to Business School in France, thus enabling myself to pursue a successful career.

Meeting the School

One day I saw a poster for the School and thought I'd go along. To me, the School is a moral pillar. It does not deny the problems of the world but always looks at the positive nature of existence. The School means a tremendous amount to me; because of the quality of the teaching and the love of colleagues I don't feel bitterness about what I've been through. Six million Jews were killed. Yet I retain hope for humanity.

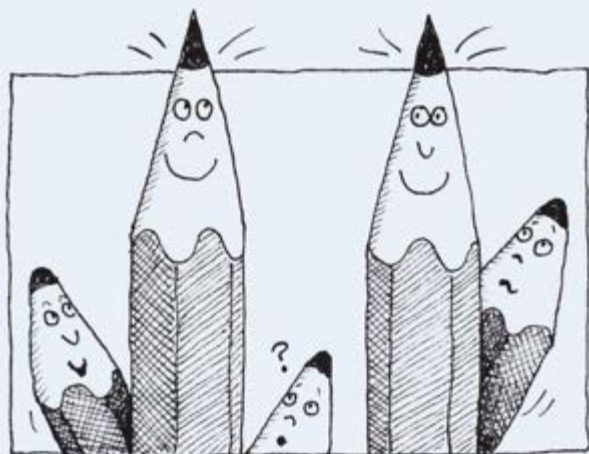
More recently, the memories have been stronger and more vivid than they used to be, possibly because of my age, so I really appreciate the pause and look forward to my group meetings. Sometimes I wake up feeling disturbed so I meditate at 4.45 a.m. for fifteen minutes just to bring the mind to rest.

Outcomes

There have been special events like being invited to Buckingham Palace to meet the Duke of Edinburgh and my story being broadcast on the BBC's 'Thought for the Day'. Finally, although I was left petrified of binding myself with a partner and children after what I have been through, I now have a twelve year old daughter to whom I am devoted. Sometimes she says to me, 'There's something very special about you.' Nowadays, if I am asked what advice I can give to people, it is always to look at the positive, there's a lot of

it about!

See Mr Leaton on UTube: [LeatonUTube](#)



Top Tips - items recommended by readers

1. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II; hear her speech aged 21, dedicating her life to the service of the Commonwealth. A remarkable example of a resolution held over 60 years. Go to [QESpeech](#)

Lessons from the Death Zone. Philip Gould died in 2011. In this short film he describes this time as the most exciting time of his life, at one with the world, full of ecstasy and happiness. Go to: [PGould](#)

3. Positive Money website, In the present situation of increasing confusion about money and debt, this site offers stimulating discussion. Watch the film, '97% owned' for a clear explanation of how money is debt. Go to [PosMon](#)

4. Meditation app: Begin and end your meditation with the sound of Tibetan bowls, keep a meditation journal and see where other people are meditating simultaneously with you. Go to the App store and search for Insight timer.

5. Auckland School: This panorama of the Auckland school will make you wish you were a student in NZ. For best effect, select the full screen option from the central control panel. Use arrow keys to navigate right, left, up, down. Go to [Auckland268](#)



Art in Action UK started in 1977. Now in its 35th year, the show will feature Commonwealth art in celebration of the Diamond Jubilee. Here, one student recounts some of his experiences at Art in Action over the years.

That Art in Action Feeling

Robin Mukherjee,
London

I look forward to Art in Action and I love being there. So far as the arts go, every year there are many new

surprises along with familiar wonders. If I get a moment, I'll head over to Glass Blowing to see Man and Element, both somewhat overheated and to some extent perspiring, working as one. I'm a bit of a sucker for

the performing arts, so I'll definitely steal a free moment to relish some African music or Indian dance. The ceramics tent, meanwhile, accounts for the best crockery in my kitchen.

What's to enjoy?

What do I most enjoy about the event? I would be hard-pressed to name any single element. A bit nerdily, perhaps, I might suggest the infrastructure - the way every department helps every other. A fuse blows and the electrician comes cycling over. The bins are full - Site Hygiene turns up cheerfully on the bin-mobile. But how can I not mention sculpture or drawing, calligraphy, music or the taste of a fresh Belgian Waffle dusted with icing sugar and laced with strawberries? It's impossible.

Most enjoy? I'll stick with 'The Feeling', which pretty much sums it up for me. Long after the tents have gone, the visitors have left and the demonstrators dispersed, that feeling remains.

The Voice

So many people are happy to help. Art in Action couldn't exist without its volunteers; whether by singing in the choir or picking up litter, everyone makes their own very real contribution to the event. Over the years I've had the pleasure of serving in various capacities from tea-maker in The Market, to Night Security, to Head of Communications.

Now I am what is colloquially referred to as 'The Voice' on the loudspeaker, along with its female counterpart, the mellifluous Anthea Douglas (*both pictured in the photo*). There are hazards in ad-libbing to 7,000 people but that's all part of the fun.

There are times when we hoped people weren't listening too closely. Such as the announcement about the tour of the frescos that came out as a 'Tesco Tour'. Or the time we accidentally sent 150 people to a dance recital that had taken place the previous day!

Deluge

One of our most-repeated stories is, by an ecclesiastical co-incidence, that of A Great Flood. I refer to The Unremitting Deluge of 2007. The events of that year are remarkable for two reasons.

Firstly, the rain. Ask any of our ancients about the history of Art in Action and, sooner or later, a sigh of stoic fortitude will precede an account of campers in the camp-site picking up their pegs and slithering across the field, of the sculpture area that became a water park and of the tractor hired to drag cars out of the mud.

But secondly, the rain just didn't matter that much. In fact, a cheery smile characterized most people as they hurled themselves through walls of water to reach the next marquee. Even knowing how meteorologically challenging the experience was going to be, people came. And, in a way, they enjoyed it all the more because getting there had been no mean feat.

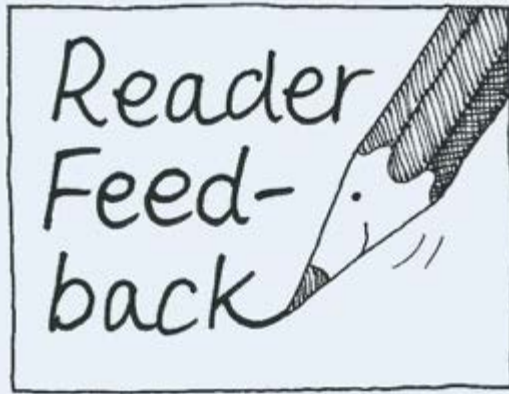
Why we come

July is rapidly approaching and there is much to prepare. Once it's all up and running I'll be back behind the microphone, risking spontaneity on the summer breeze. And yes, you may catch me, like so many veterans, gazing up at the sky from time to time with a slightly apprehensive look on my face. If you ask me what I'm doing, I might say that I'm a bit worried about that cloud. And if you press me for more . . . ah, the tales I have to tell.

I have often wondered what it is that brings us back year after year. In the end I think maybe it's just that 'Art in Action Feeling'. You can't quite pin it down. But on that first day when the visitors wander in, start speaking to the demonstrators, sit down to a pancake or wrestle with a lump of clay in the practical classes, it's unmistakable.

Art in Action this year is July 19-22: Go to the Art in Action website: [ArtinAction](#)

See Art in Action on UTube at Art.in.Action.UK



Reader Feedback

'Thank you so much for emailing insight issue 2. I enjoyed the articles. . . They reminded me of the goodness that is all around and that all things are possible through that goodness. This reminder has been very encouraging especially with regard to the present physical condition I am faced with (broken bone). I look forward to the next issue and love being part of this world wide family.'

Gauteng, South Africa

'Thanks for the latest newsletter which afforded some good reading. I checked out the Eric Whitacre site and we played it to the groups that were here last night.' Wellington, New Zealand



Amanda Pope is a teacher at Erasmus School in Melbourne. Here she describes her work with a system of self-examination which she came across.

Self-analysis: SWAN

Amanda Pope, Melbourne, Australia

Since my early teenage years, I wanted to understand the purpose of life and live it to the best of my ability rather than waste it. To be 'happy, healthy and inspired' as a friend of mine recently expressed it.

This created its own path, and in 1994 I joined the Melbourne School of Philosophy. Here was a forum in which I could press questions about myself and the world, and hear what the wise have said throughout the ages. I was never asked to accept anything that didn't wash with what I experienced for myself. Here I could consider the best that humankind offers – in science, mathematics, music, art, literature and spirituality.

Over time, a particular verse from the Bhagavad Gita has acted as a guiding principle for me: "Man must raise himself by himself ... for he himself is his friend, and he himself is his

enemy" (Ch 6. 3). I was deeply struck by these words and realized that I must dig a trench to my own well.

I realized that I alone am responsible for my choices, how I interact with the world and what I make of this life. Meditation and silence have served for more than a decade to ground the awareness in what is perfect and unchanging. There are countless practices available that can help with this; the School of Philosophy suggests a number of golden ones.

SWAN system

In 2009, I had the good fortune to come across a potent tool called 'SWAN', a recipe for transformation, from

the Rocklyn, Victoria ashram of the Satyananda Yoga organization. The system was devised by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati.

In essence SWAN is a series of questions to be pondered deeply. The responses may well navigate one's whole course through life. The sky's the limit in terms of the type of responses one may come up with, and the potential for transformation is huge.

The system:

Firstly: What are my aspirations? i) Long-term, ii) Mid-term, iii) Now.

Next:

- 1 Strengths: i) What strengths do I have to realize my aspirations? ii) What strengths do others see in me? iii) Do I have the necessary strengths to realize my aspirations? iv) What strengths do I want to develop?
- 2 Weaknesses: i) What weaknesses do I have? ii) Can I accept my weaknesses? iii) Which weaknesses do I want to eliminate? iv) What strengths can I use to overcome my weaknesses?
- 3 Aspirations: Where do these aspirations originate?
- 4 Needs: What are my most important needs?
- 5 Major discipline for the next three months:
- 6

That's it: 'SWAN' – **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **A**spirations, **N**eeds. It seems very simple, but it is only in trying it that you may find how remarkable a tool it is.

How it worked for me

At first, I had to allow the space to examine what was truly in my heart and mind. What aspirations would bring the most fulfilment? How 'big' did I want to think? Getting my responses down on paper took time. Anything to start. Over the next few days my responses became clearer and settled satisfactorily. The aspirations that surfaced were both surprising and wonderful as I hadn't realized they were hidden in my being. Had I not put them down on paper, I think I would still be happily going nowhere.

For at least a year, I returned to SWAN for 15 minutes each Sunday night to keep myself accountable to it. Every three months, I considered my responses more fully, to fine-tune them and re-orientate my life as needed. I found that my aspirations barely changed from what had first emerged. This has now become the clear purpose of my life, and this one-pointedness is completely solid, clarifying and liberating.

It was the major discipline that morphed the most. Over time, whatever was needed would present itself to me. These disciplines came most often through encounters with the wise, in person or in the written word, or from within my own silence. They were always perfectly apt.

Was there any self-criticism? No, because for me, aspirations in the 'now' category are entirely possible to meet and if they are practised then the mid-term ones will be met and so on. Part of this process is to be able to accept whatever weaknesses we may have, to discover for ourselves a means to strengthen them, and to articulate what it is we most need.

I don't actively spend a lot of time with SWAN now. There is no need. But it is still up on the inside of my wardrobe so it remains firmly in the daily consciousness, even if only an undercurrent. The seeds have taken on their own life. Though it still feels like the beginning, what has occurred so far is fulfilling those aspirations in ways I would not have dared dream possible.

If you feel drawn to SWAN, I can't recommend it highly enough. If the process serves you as I am still finding it serves me, then I am so very happy to have shared it. May all our lives meet with light and inspiration.
reply to Amanda: email APope

Thanks for reading

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Please keep that feedback coming. I need all your suggestions of personal stories, insights, links, articles, cartoons, video clips – anything that will be of interest to our philosophy community. Do you know someone in the School who has an interesting story to tell? E-mail me at: editor@seslondon.org. Thanks again for reading, CL

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